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Hester Morley's Promise.




CHAPTER I.

CASTLES IN THE AIR.

Now that Mr. Waldron had no other interests to engage him, he had leisure to give his whole attention to the affairs of the church ; and he soon came to the conclusion that the great age and growing infirmities of its old pastor demanded some efficient assistance in the performance of his duties. Since John Morley had withdrawn from all active participation in church matters, the whole power and influence had fallen naturally into the hands of Mr. Waldron, who ruled without a voice being raised against him, or even a whispered murmur among his brethren, who looked up to him from afar off as to one who had an unquestionable authority. When, therefore, he proposed, in a church-meeting assembled especially for the purpose, that a colleague should be elected

for Mr. Watson, adding, in a business-like manner, that he would pay him a salary from his own pocket, and not trouble the church with that charge, the proposition was carried unanimously and with applause; and the choice of the co-pastor was entrusted solely to him. Not solely to Mr. Waldron however. It was an all-important charge, and Miss Waldron felt that the chief responsibility rested upon her devoted shoulders, which bore some cross perpetually. In fact the church at Little Aston was governed by her through her father, though perhaps unconsciously so to him. She made the choice of a colleague a subject of prayer in all her meetings, and of very anxious thought in her own closet, which was a handsome and luxuriously furnished dressing-room, where she could meditate for hours without risk of intrusion. It would not do to have a married minister, who might be under the legitimate domination of a wife; yet a young pastor was a somewhat dangerous creature to let loose in her fold of lambs. She balanced the disadvantages of both states with the most profound solicitude, but at length decided in favour of a young minister, who should



be entirely free from female influence; the more so as she did not shrink from the necessity of keeping a more vigilant oversight of her own part of the flock. This decision was communicated to her father, but represented under quite a different phase; and Mr. Waldron agreed with her, that they might do some untried but devoted young man an untold good, by introducing him into the ministry under their patronage.

Not many days afterwards, Mr. and Miss Waldron found themselves at the entrance of a college, where the young ministers of their denomination were in training for the future discharge of the duties belonging to their office. It was a large, modern building in the suburbs of a busy manufacturing town, the distant hum of which blended with the quiet of a place of study. Of course it possessed none of the venerable associations of ancient colleges; but there was a sober air of respectability and steady work about it, not altogether unlike the factories of the neighbouring town. Miss Waldron appeared to be in her proper element—to breathe her native air. No romance clustered about the place, but there was the clear fact

of seventy or eighty students wrestling from morning till night, and possibly from night till morning again, with those knotty problems of doctrine which exercised her own spirit. An atmosphere of controversy was wafted through the long corridors, into which study-doors opened on each side in regular ranks. A murmur of theological discussion, perceptible only to fine ears, breathed in the quiet air. Again Miss Waldron felt that, by having been born a woman, she had missed her avocation. Here was her true home, and the pulpit was her sphere.

The president of the college, the Rev. James Harvey, D.D., received the ex-member of parliament and his daughter, with a mingled deference and dignity due to their position and his own. They were old acquaintances, and could dispense with some of the formalities of strangers; so that Mr. Waldron quickly opened to him the mission he had come upon, in behalf of the church at Little Aston.

"I do not promise that it shall be a very great thing for a young man," he said. "I shall ask no assistance from the church. I do not think of offering a salary of more than a

hundred a year, until I see how he suits me. But it will be an opening, and most probably would be the stepping-stone to another and wealthier church. A young minister, with my influence, might obtain a good charge in a year or two."

"No doubt, no doubt, Mr. Waldron," replied Dr. Harvey.

"We require," said Miss Waldron, thinking it was time for her to speak, "a young man of eminent piety, who will have no thought except for souls. He must be an interesting preacher, with a pleasant voice and choice language, but above all sound in doctrine. We want no German neology among us. We should like one, too, who could make himself a pleasing companion to my poor brother, who is still in the bondage of sin—one who would exert a wholesome influence over him; and as Robert is exceedingly fastidious, it is essential that he should be a gentleman, Dr. Harvey. It is still more important that he should not be self-willed and opinionative; though he must not be weak-minded, or he will soon fall into the usual follies of a young pastor. He must be one who will look to us for guidance and companionship;

and who could visit at Aston Court upon suitable terms."

The last sentence was a little vague, and a young pastor might reasonably have demanded a definition of the words "suitable terms." But Doctor Harvey bowed low to Miss Waldron, and remarked, that it would be a singular advantage to any young man. He mused for some minutes, with his pen upon his lips, as if he were passing his seventy students in review before his mind's eye. His aspect remained grave and calculating; but presently it brightened, and he nodded his head assentingly to his own thoughts.

"I have two of our young men in my eye at this moment," he said, "either of whom might do well for you, if you could assure them leisure to complete their course of study at Little Aston."

"Certainly," replied Miss Waldron; "we have a complete library which shall be at their disposal; and I should myself take great interest in their studies."

"There is David Scott," pursued Dr. Harvey, "a fine logical and analytical mind, with the true ring of Calvin in it; pure gold, sir, but

a little unrefined as yet. And there is Carl Bramwell. You recollect Charles Bramwell, our minister at Park Lane Chapel, and his father, old John Bramwell? They are the father and grandfather of this young man. A good lineage, and a young fellow of great promise, but a little too much inclined to be speculative, if he has a fault. It would be the making of either of them to be under your eye for a year or two. We will go and visit them both in their studies, if you do not mind the trouble."

Neither of them minded the trouble, and they rose to accompany the Doctor with alacrity. The profound tranquillity of the place, and the associations connected with it, brought an unusual thrill of excitement to Miss Waldron. She trod with a quicker step, and spoke in a lower key, as they passed by, one after another, the closed doors. At length Doctor Harvey paused at one, and turning to her, said, "David Scott," as he knocked a sounding knock upon the panel, and waited for a moment to hear the words "come in."

"He is a trifle deaf," said the doctor, "but a fine fellow."

Miss Waldron felt a chill, which was not removed by the appearance of the student, a gaunt, awkward, ill-dressed lad from Scotland, who stared at her with embarrassment, and was hardly able to respond coherently to the observations made to him by Doctor Harvey. Their visit lasted but a few minutes; and Miss Waldron left the study, with a painful sense of discouragement.

"I am sure he will not do for us at all," she said, plaintively.

"You ought to have seen him first in the pulpit," replied Doctor Harvey; "he is quite another being there, and handles his subject like a master. He will make a mark in the world by-and-by, I can assure you. But this is Carl Bramwell's room."


The doctor knocked lightly, but received no answer. There was an unbroken silence within the study. Miss Waldron's spirits sank yet lower; she felt doomed to disappointment.

"Bramwell must be absent," said the doctor; "but we will just look in, and see his books."

The young student was absent, but only in the sense of being absent in mind. He was seated on the low, broad window-sill, so

absorbed in the study of a book which rested upon his knees, that he had neither heard the knock, nor the opening of the door. Miss Waldron had time to give him a lightning glance of criticism, and her heart leaped with joy, which sent the warm blood to her face. His features were those which come from a long line of thoughtful and educated men: the fine, thin, spiritual face of a born scholar, scarcely concealing the ardour with which his mind was now busily at work over some favourite study. He was young, certainly not more than four-and-twenty, and his figure was slight and delicate. Just now the sun shone aslant upon his head, and displayed a profile of perfect regularity, with the lips upon the point of parting with a smile of keen intellectual delight. Miss Waldron had found the goodly pearl she had been seeking.

"Mr. Bramwell," said the doctor, laying his hand upon the shoulder of the student, who started from his abstraction with a fine glow upon his face, "I knocked, and as you gave no answer I thought your room was vacant, and I took the liberty of introducing



some friends to it, as the best in the college. Miss Waldron and Mr. Waldron."

The well-known name carried no awe with it to the spirit of the young man, but he saluted the patron of the college and his daughter with an air of well-bred respect and welcome. He stepped aside for them to admire the view from his window; and when either of them addressed him, he answered freely but modestly.

"My time here is nearly finished," he said, in answer to a question of Miss Waldron's. "I shall have been in college three years, and shall have completed my course of study, so far. It has been a happy time to me."

"Have you any church in prospect?" she inquired, with a palpitating heart.

"Not yet," he answered, smiling; "but I am not anxious about it. The doctor has promised to interest himself for me when my time is up."

"Would you be willing to give up the four or five months still belonging to you, and take a charge at once?" inquired Doctor Harvey; and Miss Waldron felt strangely

disquieted as the student hesitated before replying.

"I would rather not," he said, "but I would be governed by your advice. My examination in the London University will come off in six months or so, but I am pretty well prepared for it already. If you bade me go, doctor, I would go."

"Would you object to a small country church?" asked Miss Waldron, more anxious than ever to secure him.

"Not at all," he said, "especially for my first charge."

"Nor to a co-pastorate?" inquired Mr. Waldron.


"My colleague and I would both have to prove whether we suited one another," he answered.

"Have you any mother or sister, who would wish to live with you?" asked Miss Waldron, afraid that she should not secure him free from female influence.

"I have one only sister," answered Carl, smiling again, "and she is about to be married to a young surgeon of the name of Grant, who is settled at Little Aston, near your residence."

"We know him well," she replied, graciously. "So your sister is going to be married to Mr. Grant. Father, I am sure we may open our proposal to Mr. Bramwell. His sister's residence at Little Aston would be an inducement to him to come to us."

Carl's face kindled and flushed as he instinctively caught at the meaning of Miss Waldron's words. To live for some years near to his sister and his friend, appeared the height of human happiness to him who had so often vainly longed for a home and domestic pleasures. With a small and pure church, into which no maxims or principles of the world could find an entry; with a pleasant home in his sister's house, and the companionship of the two relatives dearest to him upon earth—he could have no desire of his heart ungratified. He heard Mr. Waldron and Doctor Harvey discoursing, but he hardly understood them. All he was sure of at the close of the interview was that a co-pastorate at Little Aston had been offered to him, and that his almost monastic study had been visited by a being who had looked at him with a gracious and pleasant



smile, and spoken to him in a voice set to a softer key than the rough masculine tones of his fellow students.


Carl Bramwell would have given his answer at once, but his cautious seniors insisted upon his taking a week to consider it. He received two letters of ecstasy from Grant and his sister. Their marriage was to take place in a few weeks, after which he was to have his home with them. Until that event he was invited to stay at Aston Court itself, to be introduced under Mr. Waldron's auspices to the church, and to be initiated by him and Miss Waldron in the onerous duties of a pastor.

It had occurred to Mr. Waldron, in connection with their choice of this young student, that nowhere could be found a more suitable match for his little favourite, Hester. The red-haired Scotchman he had rejected in his own mind the moment he saw him ; but Carl Bramwell was certainly born for Hester, and she for him. He pleased himself with building a few castles in the air, for even elderly men will be guilty of this folly at times, and when Carl came, he received him with an effusion of welcome.

CHAPTER II.

A FIRST CHARGE.

CARL BRAMWELL quitted his calm student-life with a natural feeling of regret, but also with a glow of enthusiasm at the first view of the wide stream of human interests, with its restless tides, which was about to bear him he knew not whither. He went through all the usual emotions and sensations of one who is bidding adieu finally to the tranquillity of boyhood and study; but on the other hand he felt very intensely the fact that life was beginning for him in earnest, and he held his head erect, with a new sense of dignity and responsibility. He was about to take upon his own soul the care of other souls. An unutterable and solemn tenderness filled his heart as he thought of these human spirits, frail, wavering between evil and good, tempted, sad, palpitating with the first germs of immortality planted in the midst of many thorns. He prepared his heart beforehand for the love, half that of a mother, which a true pastor should feel for his church.



How he would study his people! how he would watch over them! how quietly he would root up the choking thorns, and let the free air and sunshine play about the young buds of divine grace! This life, with its long hot days and weary weeks of labour, would be a hundredfold more worthy of a man than the serene egotism of a study.

There were other considerations which Carl's chivalrous ardour disdained to take account of. In the college he had been only one of seventy, each of whom had an equal claim to the attention bestowed upon them. He had had but the seventieth share of a pulpit. He had lived in a mass; been spoken to, looked at, fed, and generally cared for, as only an item in a large sum total. Now he was about to become the chief person in a circle, which, however small and contracted, would invest every word and action of his with importance and meaning. In a small church the pastor is even more an individual set apart than in the churches of great towns. Every one of his scanty congregation would have a lively and minute interest in him personally.

Of this future church of his, Carl knew two

persons exceedingly well by report, and had for some months taken an almost extravagant concern in them. Grant had written often about John Morley and Hester, and Carl's interest had been keenly excited. Now that he was on the point of being brought into so intimate a relationship with them, he read over again the letters which had put him into possession of so much of their history. He found himself about to enter upon the stage of one of those romantic incidents which now and then are acted before us on our journey through life.

He met with a very cordial welcome at Aston Court, and was more impressed and affected than he was himself aware of by the suddenness of the change from the bareness and inelegance of his college to the wealthy luxury of Mr. Waldron's mansion. All about him suited his somewhat delicate temperament, and chimed in with a somewhat hereditary refinement of taste. Robert Waldron seemed to him a finished gentleman; and even Miss Waldron, to a young man who had known nothing of female society during many years, appeared pleasing and graceful. She had considerably modified her early rigour on the

subject of dress, and assumed her dingy brown costume and unbecoming bonnet only when engaged in religious services. At home, and especially during the present epoch, she chose pretty colours and soft materials; and even condescended to employ a number of worldly artifices for disguising the ravages of time.

Yet towards Carl she adopted the tone of an elder sister, assuming a few years of seniority; in some degree the most flattering and most beguiling manner of administering to a young man's self-love. He was very soon persuaded that Miss Waldron was one of the most charming as well as the most saintly women of her times—only a grade or two below the perfection she sought to attain to. For she had confided to him also, that the sole object of her life was her own sanctification, and the welfare of her perishing fellow-creatures.

Robert Waldron was uneasy about this new *protégé* of his sister's, with a sharp jealousy of his ten years' juniority, and the freshness of his manhood, which still wore the glory and brightness of a morning without clouds. The first moment in which his eye fell upon the clear-cut features and the scholarly refinement

of the young pastor's face, and his ears heard the pleasant and pure utterance of his voice, he had instinctively, and with a tremor of dismay, pictured to himself Hester sitting in her seat at chapel, with her sweet, pale face, and her gray eyes, with the soul shining through them, lifted up in rapt attention to the preacher's words. He hoped ardently that he was a fool, and he tested him. But Carl was no fool; his mind was vigorous and cultivated, and his tact wonderful for a mere student. It was true that upon many points he was ignorant of the world's customs and usages; but his very ignorance was a charm; it was the pure innocence of a soul which had never looked into the muddy depths of worldly ways. Robert could not help but like him; yet he would gladly have sacrificed half his fortune to prevent Carl Bramwell becoming the co-pastor of the insignificant church at Little Aston. But fate and Miss Waldron were too strong for him.

It was well for Robert's peace of mind that he did not happen to be present at a short conversation which had taken place a morning or two after Carl's arrival. The appointed time for introducing him to his future charge

at a church-meeting was drawing near; but until then Miss Waldron had guarded her new acquisition from the intrusion of any unseasonable visitor. This evening he was to be received as co-partner with Mr. Watson in the presence of the assembled church; but early in the day a messenger arrived to say that the old minister was seized with an alarming access of his illness, and could not by any possibility leave his own chamber.

"The meeting must proceed as arranged," said Miss Waldron, decisively. "There will be the more necessity for it, as Mr. Bramwell must at once take upon himself the duties of the pastorate."

"And Hester Morley was to have been received into the church," observed Mr. Waldron.

"So she was!" exclaimed Miss Waldron, with a pause of deliberation. "What is to be done now, father?"

Carl had heard this name spoken for the first time with a quickened pulse and more attentive ear; but he waited a moment or two for Mr. Waldron's answer, which did not come.

"Who is Hester Morley?" he asked, with a

slight hesitation in his manner, which escaped Miss Waldron's not very keen observation. It needed a very obvious emotion to be manifest to her rather dull sensibility.

"She is a young girl in my Bible-class," she replied, with an air of humility, "over whom I have watched most anxiously. She is little more than a child, and worse than motherless. But that is a painful topic to us all. Mr. Waldron was to have given her the right hand of fellowship to-night, as next Sabbath is the ordinance."

"But cannot Mr. Bramwell receive her into the church?" suggested Mr. Waldron.

"I think not," she said, hastily. "Hester is very much attached to Mr. Watson, and he to her. It would be unkind to him. No, no. That will not do."

"I will see Mr. Watson and Hester in the course of the day," said Mr. Waldron.

"No, no," she urged in a peremptory tone; "it would divide the interest, and confuse Mr. Bramwell's thoughts, which should be centred on his own solemn obligations. Hester must wait."


"I have heard something of her and of her

father from Grant," said Carl, still speaking shyly, and glancing about him to see if Robert was anywhere within hearing. "They must be among the most interesting people in our church."

"Well, I don't know," said Miss Waldron, rather sharply. "I think John Morley no more a Christian than any benighted heathen in foreign lands; indeed, in my opinion, he is worse. Hester is a white-faced, thin, overgrown girl, with very little to say for herself. We do not see very much of either of them; for, of course, they are in quite a different position to ours, and now that Hester is no longer a child, I do not know that it would be well for her to visit here. I daresay you will see John Morley to-night, and if you can bring him to any better state of mind, I shall rejoice greatly. You shall have my prayers in this, as in all your other important duties."

She looked up into his face with a smile of sympathy and sisterly interest; and the young man felt penetrated with a sense of gratitude to her. But it could not altogether blot out the thought of John Morley and his daughter, and the wonder whether Hester

would not be admitted into the church that evening. As Miss Waldron had predicted, the mention of it only confused Mr. Bramwell's mind, which would otherwise have been centred upon his own solemn obligations. He remembered how Grant had once said of John Morley, "He would perhaps show his heart to you, Carl; but you will never come across him." Yet he was now about to enter upon a definite relationship with this very man, which would give him almost a right to seek his confidence. As for Hester, he felt a little disappointed at the portrait Miss Waldron had sketched of her, and he could not help smiling at the different colours in which Grant had painted it. No doubt Miss Waldron was more correct than Grant. She had seen Hester grow up under her eyes, and had known her face well. It provoked him greatly that amid all the solemn thoughts of this epoch in his life, a shade of vexation should come across him as often as the idea of Hester intruded itself upon his busy brain.




CHAPTER III.

IN SUCCESSION.

THE church at Little Aston was by no means Carl Bramwell's ideal church. With the exception of the Waldrons and Morleys, it consisted almost exclusively of very ordinary and vulgar persons, of little education and not over-enlightened religion. Their number was not so large as that of his fellow-students, every one of whose faces he could read as he preached to them. But these people looking at him were his souls. Their eyes were the open windows of spirits who were to be led by him. A fine film of tears threw a hazy glory over them. He saw nothing of the smallness and commonness and vulgarity of this very common church, some of whom "served God," as Carlyle says, "by laboriously selling a red herring." Carl's blue eyes grew dim as he sat at Mr. Waldron's right hand in a square pew under the pulpit; and he felt what an awful thing it is to take the care of souls.

He was so wrapt in this enthusiasm, that he neither heard Mr. Waldron speak, nor the congregation rise to their feet, until a voice close beside him, a voice soft and sweet and clear, suddenly rang through his trance and startled him as with an electric shock. It was nothing more than a voice starting the tune for the hymn about to be sung, but Carl turned his head quickly to the spot whence it sounded. He could not be mistaken as to who were the white-haired and sorrow-stricken man, and the young girl standing closely at his side; and his own face flushed and burned with an uncontrollable emotion as he caught the glance of both their eyes. It was a hymn of welcome, and he could have wept, but for very shamefacedness, as he listened to it.

His eyes were still dazzled, and his heart beating painfully, when, after Mr. Waldron had said what he had to say in introducing him to his Church, he was obliged to stand up alone and face his people, to give utterance to some of the feelings of his heart towards them. He was speaking with a simple eloquence and earnestness, when the vestry-door near to him was opened softly, and his friend Grant stepped



to Mr. Waldron's side, and whispered something in his ear. Carl paused, and Mr. Waldron addressed the meeting in a hurried and trembling voice.


"Brethren," he said, "our dear old pastor, who has been very ill, as you all know, is now on the point of death, and he desires to see his young colleague immediately, with brother Morley and myself. The necessity is urgent, and we must leave you at once. Let some among you engage in prayer.

A dead silence prevailed while Carl, with Mr. Waldron and John Morley quitted the lighted chapel and plunged into the darkness of the streets. To Carl it seemed more like one of the many dreams of his student-life than the sober reality that it was. His ecstasy of emotion was not yet over; the voices which had welcomed him were still ringing in his ears. Yet he was here in the unlit street, following in silence as Mr. Waldron walked before him, and with a second companion known only to him by his melancholy history. He was going too to witness the death of an old man, his co-pastor, whom he had never seen. It could be only a dream. If there were

anything real in this night's experience, it was that his ears had heard a voice which would make his heart restless till he could hear it again.

They soon reached the minister's little house, and saw one window brightly illuminated by the light which the dulled eyes of the dying often need as they go down into the valley of darkness. Carl shook off the enthrallment and bewilderment of his fancies, and roused himself to realize the scene he was about to witness. Mr. Waldron knocked gently at the door, and it was opened in an instant by a woman who awaited their arrival. A line of light fell down the little garden they had crossed ; and for the first time Carl became aware that Grant was following them, and with him a slight girlish figure whose face was veiled.

He had not time to see more, for Mr. Waldron and John Morley had gone on, and were already ascending the staircase. The chamber into which they entered was barely and scantily furnished, except with books, for it had evidently been the study of the dying man, as well as his bedroom. Their footsteps sounded loudly as they trode across the bare



and creaking boards. The curtains of faded chintz were drawn back from the bed, and the old minister's palsied head, propped up with pillows, was turned anxiously towards them. He fastened his glazing eyes upon Carl; and the two other men also turned their gaze instinctively upon him. Mr. Waldron, in his hale and hearty old age, which as yet was only grey with the coming shadow; and John Morley with his air of a century of suffering, which caused him to equal the dying man in his burden of years. These three old men faced him, and looked upon his youth with profound interest. Again he felt himself in a dream, and the silence grew intolerable to him. It was broken by the old pastor stretching out his withered and shaking hand to him, and breathing the word, "Brother."

The single word, spoken in the thin and laboured voice of death, possessed a peculiar pathos, linking as it did the old man who was putting off his mortality, with his young successor rich in vigorous life. An eternal brotherhood linked all men together in an unbroken chain with the Divine Elder Brother, of whom they were both ambassadors. Carl's

eyes grew clear, and shone with the kindling of a chivalrous enthusiasm upon the three aged men who confronted him.

"Yes," he said, grasping the chilly and wrinkled hand of the dying man in his own, "I am your brother ; and I am ready to take up your work when you lay it down. What is it you will have me do ? I have many years to live and work in yet."

"There is Hester standing behind you," answered Mr. Watson.

She had glided in with her noiseless step, and stood near to him, waiting to approach more closely the old minister. Mr. Waldron's features brightened for an instant, and Mr. Watson raised his head eagerly.

"Come near to me, Hester," he said. "There is nothing that you may not hear. Wait a moment, all of you ; I have something to say to you."

He lay still for a few minutes, collecting his thoughts ; and Carl looked round the bare room, whose emptiness and bareness made more chilly the atmosphere of death. Was this to be the end of the career upon which he had entered this evening ? He did not dare to turn

his eyes to the place where Hester sat, beside the pillow of her old friend ; but he saw her, vaguely and indistinctly, bending over him and wiping the damp cold forehead with her handkerchief. There had been a thought of his own death all day in Carl's mind, as there is in every time of unusual agitation to a sensitive and visionary spirit; but it had not been a solitary and almost friendless death like this.

"I must speak," said the minister in a sad, and well-nigh querulous voice; "I have had very much to bear upon my soul because of my church. It has been a heavy charge; and there is a great deal to be done yet before it will be without spot or blemish. The task has been too hard for me. I pray God you may be stronger for His service than I have been."


"God looks upon your work with other eyes than yours," said Carl. "You will hear Him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'"

The dim eyes brightened a little as Carl's voice repeated the familiar words; but he shook his already trembling head, despondingly.

"Nay, but I have not been faithful," he answered; "I have been afraid to speak, and kept silence often and often against my conscience. Brethren, bear with me this once. I am more afraid of God than of you at this moment. Your divisions and your want of brotherly love have been a heavy burden upon me. Brother Waldron, there has been a canker-worm of worldly pride and self-will in your heart, which must needs be cast away. You have made us all feel it,—the church and me. You were too great a man for us; there was no one to stand against you; and I never dared to say it till now."

His voice fell into almost inarticulate whispers, and he paused for more strength. Perhaps never did a deacon feel more completely confounded and thunderstruck beside his pastor's death-bed than did Mr. Waldron; but it was not a time for him to protest against his judgment.

"As for you, dear brother Morley," continued the painful voice, "you have been a continual sorrow and heaviness of heart to me. Look at what you are doing. You are throwing away your life, which ought to have been a blessing



to all about you. You have made Hester's life a grief to her."

"It is not I who have done it," replied John Morley, with a quivering face.

"Nay, but it is you," he urged; "surely the past should be forgotten. I am very sorrowful for Hester; she has had a sore burden to carry also. Will you not take it from her? Now you are all here, I commend her to you; for in me she will lose a friend, and she cannot afford to lose any. She has been like a very dear daughter unto me. You will all take care of Hester."

He did not seem to expect any answer, but turned to Hester and smiled feebly upon her. A moment or two afterwards he resumed his speech.

"My child," he said, "I was to have received you into my church to-day. Surely I may do it now in the presence of these witnesses. Hester, I give you the right hand of fellowship, in token that you are received into the church of Christ."

He laid his right hand in hers, and closed his weary eyelids, sinking back, as if exhausted, upon his pillow. Grant, who had stolen un-

perceived to the other side of the bed, placed his fingers upon his pulse, and made a sign to them to take Hester away. Carl bent down and put his mouth near to the ear of his dying colleague.

"I will stay with you till the end," he said.

"Ay, stay," he whispered; "I have need of you. I am afraid still."

It was a long night, and Carl passed it in scarcely interrupted reverie as he watched the last ebb of life receding slowly from the heart of this stranger to whom he found himself united by so strong a tie. It was a night full of checks and chills upon his young enthusiasm. The charge, even of this humble church, had been too burdensome for its pastor. Towards the end he spoke often and incoherently of Hester, and was troubled for her, repeatedly recommending her to Grant and Carl. Then his voice sank into whispered murmurings, and breathed its last word in a tone which no ear could catch. Carl had become the sole pastor of the church at Little Aston.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS WALDRON'S COUNSEL.

BREAKFAST was just finished, but the family had not yet dispersed, when Carl reached Aston Court next morning. There was a shade of embarrassment in Mr. Waldron's greeting, for he could not forget that this young man, who was under his patronage, had heard administered to him the sharpest rebuke it had ever been his lot to receive. Yet at bottom he was too true a man and too sincere a Christian to resent his dying pastor's reproach. He shook Carl's hand therefore with more warmth than usual, and looked cordially into his worn face, which was weary with the watching and the meditations of the night. Robert, who had been about to quit the table, lingered to listen to his report; with a secret impatience to hear what had occurred at the meeting the night before, and to ascertain whether Carl and Hester had yet seen one another. Miss Waldron was the first to inquire after the minister.

"He is dead," answered Carl, with the brevity of emotion.


"And what was the last utterance of our beloved pastor?" she asked. She had rather looked down upon the meek and timid old man during his lifetime; but she possessed the common and morbid curiosity for knowing the last words of the dying.

"It was inarticulate," replied Carl, evasively; "his voice failed him an hour or two before he died."

"But," persisted Miss Waldron, "there must have been some last sayings which were articulate before he lost his voice. The last words of dying saints are very precious, and they should be made the property of the church."

"He was speaking chiefly of two of the members of his church," said Carl, with reluctance; "it was his dying charge to me as his successor. He committed to my care those for whom he felt the greatest anxiety."

"And who might these be?" asked Miss Waldron; "*two* members of the church! We can be of use to you here. You know nothing of your flock as yet; but we know them.



Whom did our dear pastor so specially commend to your charge?"

Carl looked round at each face with doubt and irresolution. If Miss Waldron had been alone he would not have hesitated to tell her all; but how could he mention John Morley and Hester before Robert? Mr. Waldron guessed the reason of his reluctance, and would not yield to avoiding the utterance of John Morley's name.

"I can tell you, I believe," he said, addressing his daughter; "it would be Hester and her father."

A rapid tremor of agitation ran through Robert Waldron's frame, and he rose hurriedly from his chair as if to leave them altogether; but he only walked to the window, and stood looking out upon the terrace before it.

"But Hester is no member of the church," said Miss Waldron, almost peevishly; "and I want to know how ever she came to be present at the church-meeting last night."

"I gave her permission to be present," replied Mr. Waldron, in a mild, deprecating tone; "and, my dear, Mr. Watson received her into the church last night before he

died. It was no doubt informal ; but I was present, and so were Mr. Bramwell and her father. There was something very affecting in it, I assure you."

The tears stood in Mr. Waldron's eyes at the recollection. Everything which concerned Hester touched the softest part of his nature ; and Miss Waldron would have been struck with utter amazement at her father's folly, if she could for a moment have seen into the close recesses of his heart.

"I never in all my life heard of such a thing," she exclaimed, pronouncing the words slowly, and with marked emphasis. "What could you all have been thinking of? Hester Morley at the death-bed of Mr. Watson! That girl is the most singular person I ever met with. I do not consider her fit for church-membership, as yet. She has the most independent notions, and no clear faith in one doctrine. Poor girl! She has grown up under great disadvantages."

She stopped abruptly, for it was impossible to enumerate Hester's disadvantages before her brother, who was chafing and fuming inwardly, but who did not care to leave the room, as long as Hester was the topic of the conversation.

"What disadvantages?" asked Carl absently; speaking only because Miss Waldron paused.

She darted an apologetic and beseeching glance at Robert, who now turned round with a face dark with anger.

"Mr. Bramwell," he said in a tone which startled Carl from his absence of mind, "I suppose it is your right to learn the domestic history of your people; and I will leave you to hear that of the Morleys from my sister."

He walked out of the room without giving Carl time to answer; and Miss Waldron threw herself back in the chair, with her handkerchief to her eyes. Mr. Waldron, with an expression of shame and pain upon his face, was about to speak, when Carl interrupted him gently.

"I know it all," he said; "I knew it long before I had any thought of coming here. Grant wrote to me, and told me all he then knew, at the time he was attending Mr. Robert Waldron in Mr. Morley's house, about nine months ago."

Mr. Waldron regarded Carl with an air of profound astonishment, mingled with incredulity as to whether he had heard him aright; and Miss Waldron dropped her handkerchief, and turned a bewildered gaze upon him.

"Attending my son in John Morley's house!" ejaculated Mr. Waldron. "What did you say, Mr. Bramwell?"

"It cannot be a secret to you," answered Carl, taken by surprise himself. "Surely you knew it, Miss Waldron? Your brother was almost murdered at the door of Mr. Morley's house about nine months ago."

"Robert had an accident nine months ago," she said, "through which Mr. Grant nursed him; but it was at Beckbury, twenty miles from here."

"I have done wrong," cried Carl, with a look and tone of concern; "but it did not occur to me for an instant that you did not both know the facts. I knew that he wished the secret kept from the townspeople, which I very well understood. I beg of you not to betray my indiscretion to him. If you wish me to gain his esteem and friendship, it would only prejudice him against me."

He spoke with extreme earnestness, and addressed himself rather to Mr. Waldron than to his daughter. With her he felt sure that he was safe.

"But what is it?" asked Mr. Waldron, with

impetuosity; "I must know the whole of it now. What did you say? Robert almost murdered at John Morley's door!"

"Grant can tell you all about it," said Carl; "but if he will not, I will read his letter again, or put it into your hands, on condition that you do not betray either of us to your son. If I could see any good to result from letting him know of it, I would make no condition at all; but I do not."

"I will go and question Grant this moment," exclaimed Mr. Waldron, hurrying away with more than ordinary energy, and leaving his daughter alone with Carl. There had been very much to excite and trouble her in the foregoing conversation; for Robert had already insinuated to her his own apprehensions relating to Carl and Hester. It had been done with caution and finesse, but there was a dread in the depths of her own heart with which it exactly coincided. It would be hard indeed if Carl were so soon to cease to belong exclusively to herself. He drew nearer to her, and appealed to her in a tone of earnest but deferential importunity.

"Mr. Watson committed Hester Morley

to the care of Grant and myself," he said ; " but what can we do for her ? It is you who are so good, and to whom the Master has entrusted so many talents, who should be the friend of this lonely girl. I do not know what calamity Mr. Watson feared for her, but there seemed some special dread about her future. What could I do to protect her from sorrow and danger ? I will be indeed her friend, but you are wiser and better than me, a woman like herself ; your heart has a purity and tenderness unknown to man. You will be her friend, even as you are already so generously and so nobly mine ? "

He spoke with eloquent warmth, and approached her so closely that his hand nearly touched hers. There was a peculiar fascination about the mere presence of a young and pleasing woman, such as she appeared to him ; and this morning he felt more than usual the need of a woman's gentle ministry to chase away the gloomy impressions of the night.

" Ah ! " sobbed Miss Waldron, with very real and very bitter tears, " I am so much your friend that I tremble for you ; so impulsive and

so inexperienced as you are. I am older than you, and have seen much, both in the church and the world. I foresee that you may attain to great eminence and usefulness ; but a single false step at the outset of your career may become your ruin. Be warned in time. I am frank with you because I feel a great regard for you. Leave the charge of poor Hester Morley to me, and do not take too great an interest yourself in her welfare. She is young and foolish, and might draw you into a difficulty it would be hard to escape from."

Miss Waldron succeeded in pronouncing these sentences in a tone penetrated with candour and a deep concern in him. The hot quick blood of his sensitive nature had mounted to his face, and a spark of almost angry resentment had kindled in his eyes ; but he could not steel himself against her agitation and tears. There was subtle, delicious flattery in this warm interest of a woman, his elder and superior, which compensated for the gall of the admonition. When she raised her eyes to him, sparkling through her tears, they met a glance in his which made her heart glow with a sensation altogether new to her. Her

eyelids dropped, and her lips trembled ; but she mastered her emotion sufficiently to resume the conversation in a somewhat lighter tone.

“ I speak for your sake,” she said. “ Hester has a certain amount of beauty which would make it excusable for a man young as you are to be attracted by it. But I know of no one so unsuitable to become a prominent member of any church, such as a minister’s wife should be. Of course, some day you will fall in love and marry, but I trust not with Hester Morley. She is visionary and unsound in the faith ; she is not to be trusted. There is not the spirit of the daily cross in her. Though she is in the church, she belongs to the world. Her only friend is a frivolous Frenchwoman of the lower orders, a Papist ; and Hester herself owns that she makes no effort to convert her. She says that she is too old for change, and too dark to understand our pure and lofty creed. I shall insist, some day, upon bearing the bread of life to this famishing soul ; for Hester, who sees her frequently, does not feed her with a single crumb. You can judge how unfit she is for a post of honour in the vineyard. Therefore I warn you beforehand. ‘ As a jewel of gold in

a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.'"


With this harsh quotation hurled at Hester, Miss Waldron concluded her admonition, and Carl remained silent. Seeing the impression she had produced, she recommended him, with an air of sisterly sweetness, to seek some repose before entering on the necessary preparations for the services of his first Sunday as pastor of the church. Carl obeyed with alacrity, and shut himself up in his own room for the rest of the morning.

CHAPTER V.

A PAINFUL DISCOVERY.

IN the meantime Mr. Waldron was hastening with all speed to find Grant, before he left his lodgings to make his morning call upon his patients, whose number was increasing with fair rapidity under the prestige of Mr. Waldron's patronage. He burst upon him just as he was preparing to go out, and lost no time in beating about the bush. As a statesman Mr. Waldron had known no tactics, except that of asking straightforward and pungent questions, and he tried no other means now. Grant was as frank as himself; and having a greater respect for him than for his son, and being rather glad at Carl's inadvertence, he soon put Mr. Waldron into possession of all the facts he knew.

"But what rancour there must be in John Morley's soul!" cried Mr. Waldron, sinking into a chair, and resting both his hands upon the arms of it. "I can barely credit it, Grant. Were you convinced then, both of you, that he, and nobody else, could have struck the blow!"



"Is there any other man who owes him such a grudge?" asked Grant, bluntly.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered, in accents almost peevish, and with a gesture as if he would have nothing to do with it. "My son has wounded me to the very quick; and I have ceased to seek out his faults. He will have to bear the consequences himself, here and hereafter."

His upright head sank a little on his breast; and his eyes, bright and undimmed still, met Grant's regard ruthfully.

"You are too hard upon him," said Grant, with an honest plainness which was as honey to Mr. Waldron. "I would stake my head that this is the only folly of which he has been guilty; and he was little more than a boy when he fell into it. He was four years younger than I am; and, dear me! what I might have done if I'd been rich and idle and an only son, like him!"

Mr. Waldron breathed more calmly, and the rigid muscles about his mouth relaxed into the expression which generally served him as a smile. But his mind instantly recurred to John Morley.

"Yet how could you account for him taking you into his own house?" he asked.

"He could do nothing else," answered Grant. "I walked into the nearest house with your son in my arms, and Hester had let me in before he knew anything of it. To screen himself he was obliged to let us remain. Neither of us believe that he had any previous design to attack him; but seeing him sauntering about the street which he was forbidden to enter, John Morley was overcome by a sudden access of revenge and passion. A blow struck more warily must have killed him; half an inch, ay, the tenth of an inch would have done it."

"But what weapon did he use?" asked Mr. Waldron, shuddering.

"Some days afterwards," he replied, "I saw in his workshop several iron bars, from a foot and a half to four feet in length. They are used for screwing up the binding-presses. If one of these happened to be at hand it would form a very likely weapon."

"I am afraid it must be true," said Mr. Waldron.

"I am sure of it," replied Grant.

"But, how then?" he exclaimed. "You choose this man for your friend, you visit him daily, believing him all the while to be a murderer!"

"No more a murderer than you or I," said Grant, calmly. "I have studied John Morley; he is as soft-hearted as a woman, always apt to be overwhelmed by the sin and misery of the world. To him there must be a constant pressure of despair from the thought of the sin and misery of the wife he has loved and lost. If he knew for certain that she was dead, half his burden would fall off. When he saw your son, a frenzy seized him, and I do not wonder at the blow he struck. In many countries it would pass for a virtue rather than a crime."

"But he is a member of the church," said Mr. Waldron, "and attends the means of grace."


"Just now," answered Grant, "a long walk every day would be the best means of grace for him, and it would do him more good to be a member of the Alpine Club. The truth is, he is crusted over with morbid melancholy amounting to monomania. Why, I should commit a score of murders if I lived, as he

does, in the eternal gloom of that house! So would you, Mr. Waldron.

"Hush! there he is," cried Mr. Waldron.

In a window nearly opposite them could be seen the head of John Morley set in the blackened and decayed frame of the casement. He stood motionless, looking upwards with blank eyes which evidently saw nothing. The deep lines in his face seemed more furrowed than ever, and his whole aspect was one of grim and perpetual hopelessness. He glanced round once, and his eyes appeared to sweep the full range of their sight, as if searching for some object which he had lost, but which he had long since despaired of finding. Mr. Waldron watched him with painful and contending emotions.

"Grant," he said, "I'd give him half my possessions if they would do him any good. Yet he almost killed my son, my only boy! I feel nearer hating him than I ever felt towards any man. You do not know how a father feels! Why, it was only last night I shook the hand that had been raised against my boy's life! I hope I am a Christian. God deliver me in His abundant grace from the devil! But



to think what it would have been if Robert had been murdered, and I had never heard him speak again. He was such a good boy once, Grant; a good, affectionate, conscientious boy was my Robert. Bob I called him then. And that man yonder had nearly killed him! I wish he would take half my fortune, and go away out of the country. But to-morrow I shall see him at chapel, and next week he will stand beside me at the grave of our old pastor. I had better go home and think it all over quietly by myself; and may God give me grace to prove myself a true Christian."

He wrung Grant's hand convulsively, and took a last furtive glance at the gray, despairing face in the window opposite. Then he retraced his steps homewards, and, like Carl Bramwell, shut himself up in his room alone, to think over the discovery of John Morley's crime and Robert's danger.

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CHAPTER VI.

HESTER'S SANCTUARY.

MISS WALDRON took care that Carl should have no opportunity of seeing Hester again until some of the excitement of his new position had worn off, and until she had established a stronger influence over him. It was astonishing how great an effect her clever platitudes had upon him. She possessed the art of investing common-place observations with a seeming profundity which might easily have imposed upon an older man than Carl; while at the same time she surrounded him with those thousand minute delicate attentions which lie only in the power of a woman. Once or twice she drove with him to John Morley's house, and waited in the carriage at the door while he made a pastoral call; by which means she insured an extreme brevity of visit, and had the satisfaction of learning that Hester had not made her appearance.

How long she could have maintained this careful line of conduct is uncertain, if Grant had

not been impatient to introduce Carl more familiarly to John Morley ; and he took the first chance that presented itself. Carl naturally chose to see a good deal of his future brother-in-law ; and though Grant was made welcome at Aston Court by all, even by Miss Waldron, who was fully awake to this weak point in her position, yet she could not forbid the young minister visiting him in his own rooms. A favourable opportunity occurred before long, when Grant invited him, without formality, to call upon John Morley.

"I want you, if possible, to infuse a little hope into his nature," said Grant ; "and then, if I could induce him to shut up shop an hour earlier, and take some healthy exercise instead of going to the prayer-meeting, we should make him a tenfold better Christian than he is. Don't you agree with me ?"

"To be sure I do," answered Carl.

"Miss Waldron wouldn't," said Grant, laughing ; "but it stands to sense that when a poor fellow's liver is as bad as a liver can be, he cannot be as good a Christian as he ought to be. I'll make you see that as plain as print, Carl, if you will only attend."

"Hadn't we better see Mr. Morley first?" suggested Carl.

"Well, I'm ready," he answered. "I don't need a hat just to cross the street. There, a customer has gone in—a rare bird opposite—but if you like we will go and see Hester first. I am quite at home over yonder."

He proved the truth of his last words by entering the house without knocking at the door. The lobby had a damp earthy smell, at which he uttered a significant "Faugh!" He passed on without ceremony up the staircase to Hester's little sitting-room, the door of which was half open. It was the same homely, austere, bare room where Robert had passed his weary hours of convalescence. To Carl's student-eyes it was full of charms. The glitter of gilded bindings upon the bookshelves; the pile of snowy work upon the table where Hester had been sewing with an open volume before her. A small thimble lay upon the page, so curious and rare a toy to Carl that he could not forbear to take it up and try it upon his own fingers, one after the other, until it fitted the least. He wished that Miss Waldron would sometimes employ herself with sewing. The open book

was one of his special favourites ; and several others upon the shelves were well worth his own reading. He put his hat down on the table near to Hester's work, and regarded the whole with a singularly pleased smile upon his lips. There were no more than two chairs in the room, Hester's and another. He took the other, and looked across to her seat beside the white work and the open book and the thimble lying upon the page. Miss Waldron's kind admonitions were all lost upon him.

He had been in the room, Hester's sanctuary, alone, for Grant had left him there while he went to seek for her. Grant was not actually away more than a minute, for he had gone only to the end of the long passage, to the door which connected the workroom with the dwelling, and there shouted to Lawson, in his loud, sonorous voice, to ask if she was up in the attic. Hester's own clear tone had answered, inviting him to come up to her. He went back to fetch Carl.

"She says we are to go up to her," he announced.

"Who says?" asked Carl, absently.

"Who says?" echoed Grant; "good gracious,

Carl, what a dreamy fellow you are! Why, Hester says so, Hester Morley. I wonder at you. Come along with me."

Carl followed him, almost with a guilty conscience, a sense of treachery and disobedience to Miss Waldron. Yet was it not decidedly his duty to become acquainted with Hester? He would set so strict a guard over himself that he would not fall into the danger his kind sisterly friend apprehended. He knew indistinctly that they were passing through some remarkably dingy rooms, and up a narrow staircase; and then they came to a flood of sunshine, and a glorified attic, with a young, lovely, graceful girl standing in the midst of the sunbeams, glowing and blushing with surprise, and looking into his face with shy, almost timid, gray eyes. It was time for Carl to shake off his absence of mind. It was perfectly necessary that he should conduct himself as a pastor. After uttering a few words, what he knew not, he looked round the curious apartment, and saw an undersized and withered-looking man standing behind Hester. When he met Carl's eyes he bowed profoundly, and with an ease that confounded the young scholar, who had

made no study of any mode of salutation. It was a full minute before he could venture to glance at Hester again, but when he did so, she had turned back to the binding-press in the window where Grant was looking carefully at her work. Carl drew a step or two nearer to them.

"Mr. Bramwell," she said, "this is my own work. I have learned to gild the books after Lawson has bound them. This is Lawson, my father's bookbinder, and my oldest friend."

Carl shook hands cordially with Lawson.

"Mr. Grant ought not to have brought you up here the very first time," continued Hester, a little reassured. "I did not know you were with him, or I should have come downstairs to you."

"I am very glad you did not know," said Carl, with difficulty.

"I am not sure that I am altogether sorry," answered Hester, feeling a girlish sympathy with his evident embarrassment, and talking the more fluently because of it. "You know I have seen you several times already, though I have not spoken to you and I do not feel as if you were quite a stranger. Besides, Mr. Grant

has talked to me a great deal about you and your sister. I know all about her; and I do hope she will like me very much when she comes to live at Little Aston.

Carl felt as if he should renounce his sister if she did not make Hester her chief friend,—after Miss Waldron, perhaps.

“I think,” said Hester, with a charming little toss of her head, “it is quite as well you should know at once that I belong to the working classes. Yes; I work up here five or six hours a day, for poor Lawson’s hand is not always steady enough for it. I am not at all an idle elegant young lady; Mr. Grant will tell you that. He sits by the press sometimes for a whole hour watching me.”

What would not Carl give for such a privilege? He caught himself wondering whether he should ever do the same, and reproved himself sharply for it.

“Hester looks upon me as an old married man,” said Grant, with a laugh; “and I believe I am the only one she ever sees, except her father and Lawson.”

A flush crept slowly over Hester’s face until it deepened into a crimson hue of shame, so

plain and so painful that both of them turned away on pretence of looking at the specimens of binding upon the walls.


"She is as shy as a lapwing," whispered Grant in Carl's ear. "I ought not to have said it."

"We will go downstairs now," said Hester, after a moment's pause; and she took off her large apron, and smoothed down the sleeves which had been rolled up above her round and dimpled elbows. "My father will be very glad to see you, Mr. Bramwell. For the last three or four years Mr. Watson could not come often to see us, and my father receives no other visitors, except Mr. Grant."

Carl followed her downstairs, wondering at his own silence and the difficulty he felt in speaking to her. Relief came to him in John Morley's presence, for the melancholy and reserved man brightened at the appearance of him and Grant. The fire and beauty of their early manhood, its freshness and buoyancy, had still a nameless charm for him in the midst of his disease and gloom. He listened to their keen lively conversation, and allowed himself to be drawn into its current. Carl was conscious of

talking well and aptly, and of interesting his host; and he stayed so long that Grant was compelled to leave him. He scarcely knew how he had the courage and resolution to say farewell at last; but he awoke from a confused trance as his foot struck against the massive door-sill of the entrance-hall at Aston Court, and he felt that the next minute he should be in the presence of Miss Waldron.

Should he tell her where he had been, or keep it a secret from her? He felt guilty enough to know that he had gone very near the folly against which she had so emphatically warned him. Yet he was a free man, in bondage to no one. But did not any friendship, and especially a friendship so close and discriminating as Miss Waldron's, in some measure militate against freedom in its completeness? Did he not owe a return of frankness and confidence to one who was so entirely, so sweetly open to him? Yet, on the other hand, what had he to tell? He could not confess that he had put his hat down on the table close to Hester's work, and tried her thimble on each of his own fingers. His veins tingled at the recollection. No; there was nothing to say about his visit,



and it would only give rise to misapprehension in Miss Waldron's mind if he mentioned it.

With this reflection, amounting almost to a resolution, he went on into the drawing-room, where the servant told him, volunteering the information with a covert smile, that he would find Miss Waldron. She greeted his arrival with the blandest of welcomes, and invited him to a seat upon an ottoman placed near her own lounging chair in front of a window. She was herself in the shade of the curtains, which shed a becoming hue over her somewhat faded face.

"You have been absent for some time," she said, softly; "it is more than an hour since I went to the library to look for the seventh volume of Kitto, and you were then gone away. Have you been making some visits among our people?"

"I went to see Grant," answered Carl, with an air of hesitation.

"To be sure," she continued; "I suppose he is now very busy with his preparations. Is there nothing I can do to help them on? You know for *your* sister I should be delighted to do anything in my power; only I suppose we shall lose you when she comes to Little Aston."

Miss Waldron heaved a sigh, which spoke inexpressible things, and remained silently musing, with a sad eye fixed upon the future, for some moments. She then resumed her conversation rather abruptly.


"Then you only went to see Mr. Grant," she said.

"No, not exactly," stammered Carl; "at least, I went only with the intention of seeing him, but he asked me to go across with him to Mr. Morley's.

"Indeed!" said Miss Waldron, with a significant coldness in her tone; and then she betook herself to silence, which extracted more information from Carl than the most persevering cross-examination would have done.

"We went across," he said, in hurried accents; "and as Mr. Morley was engaged, Grant took me upstairs into the workshop, where the binding is done. Hester was there, but we stayed only a few minutes, and then we came down to see Mr. Morley. He is, as Grant says, a singular study; and it is possible that I may do him good."

"And get harm to yourself," she replied, forebodingly.



"No, I think not," he said; "but if it were so, should I do well to set my own welfare before his? Ought I never to run any risk to myself for the sake of the souls of my people? We applaud those who go into a plague-house at the peril of their own lives; and should not I, in my ministry to others, sometimes lose sight of my own soul?"

He spoke with ardour and agitation, while Miss Waldron fixed upon him a dull gaze of wonder and disapprobation.

"I do not agree with you," she said; "no charge can be so important as that of our own soul. But I will pray for you that you may not be overtaken in a snare. Would it not be a help to you if we met one another at the throne of grace at some stated time?"

Carl was perplexed, and looked questioningly into Miss Waldron's face.

"I scarcely understand," he said.

"I mean, shall we appoint a season when we may both pray in our own closets, with the knowledge that the other is similarly engaged at the same moment? It is a great help to those who try it."

Carl shaded his eyes with his hand, and


steadily studied the pattern of the carpet before he replied. A man of his age and temperament is often more bashful, not to say modest, than a woman of Miss Waldron's years and disposition. He did not raise his eyes, and he looked very much put out of countenance.

"I think not," he murmured; "there is such a solemn secrecy in prayer between God and our souls. I feel as if we ought to be alone before Him. Some may find it a help, but I think it would distract me."

A silence of several minutes followed, which was becoming almost terrible to him; when at last Miss Waldron broke it in tones of profound emotion,—

"Still I will pray for you," she said, "and watch for your soul. I proposed it for your sake only, that you might feel that you were not contending with the tempter alone. You are not alone,—you never will be while I remain your friend."

She rose, sobbing, and retired, it may be supposed, to her closet; leaving Carl in an uncomfortable state of doubt as to whether he had not behaved like a brute.



CHAPTER VII.


A PERILOUS PATH.

THE marriage of Grant with Carl's sister was celebrated as soon as they could enter into possession of their pleasant house on the road to Aston Court. It was within a few hundred yards of the park gates, and in the direct route between the Court and the town. As soon as Grant returned from the necessarily brief tour of a young country surgeon, Carl quitted Aston Court, and took up his permanent abode in their new home.

Miss Waldron had manifested a very charming interest in everything relating to Carl's sister; and had added several ornaments and luxuries to her dwelling, even before having seen her. Nothing could surpass the emphasis of her patronage and kindness to the young wife upon her entrance into her new sphere. Oddly enough, there was a superficial resemblance between Annie Grant and Rose Morley, which struck painfully upon Mr. Waldron, though it escaped the observation of his

daughter. She possessed the same slight and girlish figure, and the same fair hair and blue eyes; yet the similarity of circumstances and position, in the first pride and happiness of marriage, may have formed the chief resemblance between them. The same impression was produced by her on the mind of Hester. She had not been witness to the gay and innocent importance of a young wife since she had seen it in her step-mother. The old memories rushed back like a flood upon her, and the old sadness, which had been lighter of late, once more returned to her face.

It is probable that John Morley himself was oppressed by this likeness; for even his friendship for Grant and Carl, a passive, undemonstrative sort of friendship, was not strong enough to induce him to traverse the market square of Little Aston, and approach the gates of Aston Court, in order to pay a wedding visit to the young doctor and his bride. Annie Grant went to see him, but her gay looks, her cheerful voice, and the bright colours of her dress, all jarred upon his morbid nature. After her visit, he had an access of melancholy which reacted upon Hester. They felt that they



dwelt apart in a charmed circle, which they could not pass, and which no other could enter. Yet there was one other encircled by the same heavy chain who could no more escape from it than they could. Robert Waldron stood aloof from all the small festivities of the honeymoon ; and his obvious melancholy strengthened the link between him and Hester. These others, so glad and happy and hopeful, what had they in common with her ? Their eyes were too dazzled with light to see clearly into the darkness where she and her father dwelt. She loved them with a love which excluded envy, but fate placed her altogether apart from them all.

She did not go so often as she might have done to Grant's house, or so often as Carl had, unconsciously to himself, hoped she would have done. He did not associate with her in the pleasant familiarity he had looked for. To be sure his actions were now free from the hourly scrutiny of Miss Waldron ; but her kindly surveillance was not at an end. The distance between the two houses was not great, and there was no part of the town to traverse. She could come up in the most negligent and becoming morning costume, or even with a shawl

thrown over her evening toilette, to spend only a few minutes with dear Mrs. Grant, at the most unexpected of hours. Her studies were growing more profound than ever, and Carl's Hebrew and Greek were in perpetual request. She soon knew the place of every book upon his shelves better than he did, and often employed herself with setting them in order for him. He felt that he ought to be grateful, and he strove to be so. It was impossible for him not to be pleased and flattered.

Robert Waldron did not miss seeing his advantage, and making the most of it. Hester went the oftener to visit Madame Lawson, because she could take no pleasure in going to Grant's house; and he did not fail to meet her there as often as he judged it prudent. It had become an unnecessary thing to make any excuse for seeing her thus, as Hester had fallen into a habit of taking it tacitly for granted. In a place so small as Little Aston it required some tact to prevent their meetings becoming known; but he was a master of ingenuity. Besides, the entrance to the court was not commanded by any window, except those of the house where old Mr. Watson had used to live.

The few inmates of the court were working folks, who had enough to do to mind their own business; and the woman of the house he gained over by judicious presents. There was positively no danger, either to Hester or him, of their secret being betrayed. He considered himself advancing, with sure and steady progress, towards his end.

Hester's new melancholy was rather a soft and tender sadness than the old, hard, gloomy monotony of the continual weight of dejection. There is a moment in the early dawn when the growing light seems to tremble and draw back a little, as if it would fain linger longer in the dark mantle of the night. Such a moment had come to Hester. Her eyes had caught a light brightening on the horizon, and her heart had felt a glow of warmth reaching it; and for a moment or two longer she wished to keep her eyes closed, and take back the familiar chill to her heart. She knew herself no more. Caprices, foreign to her hitherto, had gained the mastery over her. Sometimes a passion of tears shook her; at others a vehement desire to exhaust herself by action, when the binding-press in the attic seemed like a refuge to her.

The shrewd old Frenchwoman fancied she could read the girl's heart like an open book ; and a hundred cunning little wrinkles netted themselves about her eyes and lips. She assured milord Robert that before long it would be quite safe to tell Hester of his love.

It was the hope, both of Mr. Waldron and Robert, that Grant's marriage might open the way naturally for once more inviting Hester to visit at Aston Court. The small festivities attending it might include her. When, therefore, Miss Waldron announced her opinion that it would be but a graceful courtesy to invite Grant, his bride, and Carl to dinner, with something of ceremony and state about it, Mr. Waldron gently insinuated that Hester, also, might be induced to join them, or rather that John Morley might listen to the invitation. Miss Waldron would probably have scouted the idea with indignation, had not Robert warmly seconded his father. She knew exactly how far she could venture in opposition to her brother ; and it was very plain that he had so set his heart upon this as to make contradiction dangerous.

In consequence, Mr. Waldron was permitted

to introduce the subject to John Morley, which he did in an informal manner at the close of a Sunday evening service, judging it best to take him utterly by surprise. Mr. Waldron had shaken hands with Hester, and looked into her face with one of his half-fatherly glances of affection, when he turned to John Morley with an air as if he had but just thought of the matter.

"By-the-by, Mr. Morley,"—he had dropped the epithet, brother, some time ago,—“Grant and our young minister, with Mrs. Grant, dine with us to-morrow. I think you ought to let my little friend Hester come with them. She wants some young society. Give me your promise that she shall come to-morrow.”

He waited with ill-concealed anxiety for the answer, and John Morley looked keenly but silently at him; longing to inquire whether Robert was at Aston Court, for he knew nothing of his movements, yet unable to bring his lips to pronounce his name.

“Should you like to go, Hester?” he asked.

Hester’s heart had bounded with mingled surprise and pleasure at Mr. Waldron’s invitation. For the last week or two time had been

very monotonous and irksome to her, and she felt a girl's natural desire for some change. Besides, there was no shock to her in the idea of meeting Robert Waldron, whom she had seen so often of late.

"I should like it very much," she answered, "if you would not be grieved, father."

"No, no," he said, hurriedly. "She shall come, Mr. Waldron; she shall come."

John Morley drew his daughter's hand through his arm, as they passed through the chapel porch, and looked down upon her questioningly by the light of the lamp hanging over the entrance.

"Hester," he said, with a new tone of tenderness in his voice, "Hester, they invite you now to their parties. Is it that you are grown up into a woman?"

"I suppose so, father," she answered, half gaily and half sadly.

"How old are you then, child?" he asked.

"I am nearly twenty," she replied.

"Twenty!" echoed John Morley. "And I have taken no count of the years! Your mother was no older than you when I married her; and she has been dead these nineteen

years. Have you any thought of being married, Hester ?”

The question was put in simple seriousness, but in the tone rather of a friend, than of a father, who might expect to have a voice in the matter. Hester’s hand trembled a little upon his arm, but he did not perceive it.

“How should I, father,” she said.

“Ah! how should you ?” he repeated. “You see no one, and know no one. Yet, my child, I should like to know that you were happily married. When I think of it I feel that I have done you a great wrong. But you shall go this once to Aston Court. Have you any pretty dress you can wear, child ?”

It was so extraordinary a thing for John Morley to concern himself in so frivolous a subject as dress,—his own or any one else’s,—that Hester could scarcely believe she had heard him aright. Her wardrobe was scanty, for money was scarce, and becoming more so every month; but she assured him, with an evasion very like a deviation from strict truth, that she should do very well.

“Hester,” he said, when they had reached a dark part of the street, and she could not


see his face, though she could detect a sharp anguish in his voice, "do you know if his son is at home?"

"Yes," she answered softly, and pressing his arm to her side.

"You will see him, and speak to him," he resumed. "I cannot. God forgive me in this, if I sin in it. I believe it would kill me to meet either of them; and I am not fit to die yet. But they say he is contrite and repentant. I give you my consent to see him."

The confession that she had already seen him trembled upon Hester's lips; but the recollection of his prolonged agony of despair sealed them. If she had had anything definite to tell him about Rose she would have had the courage to do it; but to say only that she was lost would be simply to awaken the sharpness of his grief again. She resolved to pursue her course of concealment, and to hide everything from him that could add to his sorrow. It was a perilous path for a young girl to choose.

Robert heard that Hester was positively coming to Aston Court, with a delight which he could scarcely disguise. Ever since he had



come to the conclusion that she, and she alone, could satisfy his fastidious notions of what his wife must be, he had longed to avail himself of the advantages his position and surroundings gave to him. Hitherto she had met him only in Madame Lawson's garret; and he wished her to see him in his own sphere,—the master of a position which must dazzle her young mind. He contrasted with self-gratulation the sumptuous elegance and costly taste which he had introduced into his father's mansion, with the bareness and poverty of her own home. All the next morning he sauntered about the handsome rooms, and the terraces, where still lingered much of beauty, even in the later days of autumn. He pleased himself with picturing Hester at his side, expressing more by looks than words her shy pleasure in this loveliness and luxury. By a curious perversity of reasoning, he had begun to regard a marriage with her as a fitting compensation for the wrong he had been guilty of towards her family. He felt sure that he could make his father acknowledge the strength of his arguments; but how could he convince John Morley? He must secure Hester's love first.

The evening came, and the hour when Hester should arrive. Miss Waldron had sent a carriage to Grant's house, for Carl was suffering from a cold, which made it necessary to load him with most gentle attentions. She had, however, let Hester slip out of her mind; and as Annie Grant and Carl had no knowledge of her accepted invitation, they had, of course, come without her. Robert felt a wrathful pang of disappointment; though he was not altogether sorry that Carl and Hester had not been riding in the same carriage. Mr. Waldron himself was keenly disappointed. The night was dark and foggy, and Hester had no one to escort her through the lonely park. Miss Waldron said she was sorry, with a lurking smile of satisfaction, and busied herself to see that Carl had the warmest seat by the fire. Robert made no complaint, but went out quietly to order the carriage back to Little Aston, and at the moment that he passed through the hall, the large doors were thrown open by a servant, and Hester herself appeared upon the threshold.

She stood still for an instant, with a glance, half-frightened, into the great hall, which was

brilliantly lit up. Her lips were slightly parted, and her breath came flutteringly with the speed at which she had been walking, and her large grey eyes were still deep and dark with the darkness through which she had come. The night, with its thick fog, looked black behind her, while the coloured pavement of the hall and the stained glass of the lamp over her head, made the foreground rich in tone. The strong contrast of light and shadow, with Hester standing on the line which separated them, looking lonely, embarrassed, and timid, formed a perfect picture to Robert's eyes. He hurried forward to welcome her, and the servant drew back respectfully.

"Is it possible you have come all alone?" he asked.

"I had no one to come with me," she replied. "I went to Mrs. Grant's, but she was gone. I was obliged to walk on alone or return home."

"Did you wish to come so much?" he said, lowering his voice. "Are you, then, glad to be here again, Hetty?"

Her answer was not ready, and her eyes drooped till he could see the nervous quivering of the long eyelashes.

"I think I am," she said at last; "I am not sure. In some things it seems scarcely right to be here; but still I am a little glad."

The gladness was so qualified, and the qualification so conscientiously expressed, that Robert did not know what to reply.

"Go and take off your shawl," he said, touching it lightly with his hand; "I will wait here for you, to take you into the drawing-room."

He watched her intently as she followed his sister's maid up the broad low steps of the staircase with a subdued and quiet grace which was perfectly in tune with his matured taste. He paced up and down the hall, chafing at every moment she was away. There were twenty minutes yet till the hour for dinner, and he would keep her all to himself for that short period. Impatient as he was, he did not see her descend the staircase, and did not know she was close beside him, so noiseless was her approach, until she spoke in tremulous accents, and then he started violently. There was a **scarcely-mastered** excitement in herself which lent a colour to her cheek, and when she placed her hand upon his offered arm, he felt that it was trembling.

"We will not go into the drawing-room just yet," he said. "I have a painting or two to show you."

He led her into a room which had been built especially for his own use, since his return to Aston Court. It was lofty and spacious, and wainscoted throughout by carved panels of some light wood which had a pleasant lustre upon its surface. There were a few good pictures, and here and there a handsome cabinet or bookcase. At one end was an organ which he had ordered to be made for this particular place, that the volume of sound should suit the space exactly; for he had become almost a master of music. A piano stood beside the organ. There was nothing of beauty or luxury lacking which his heart could desire; and over all a soft light was shed by shaded lamps. He led Hester to the hearth, and placed her in a low chair before the fire. There he stood, with his arm resting on the mantelpiece, looking down upon her drooping head and shy, almost awkward, attitude of embarrassment. How poorly she was dressed, in her gray stuff gown, with her sole ornament, a little silver brooch, fastening the

collar round her graceful throat. There was not a maidservant in the Court who could not have put on a smarter dress to go out on a visit. It would form an odd contrast with his sister's toilette, and the unfaded finery of the young wife. But he liked it well. The very poverty and simplicity of Hester's appearance was charming to him. Perhaps she guessed partly what he was thinking about as his downward gaze scrutinized her, for she glanced up to him with a smile of singular archness and sweetness.

"I am not very fit for such a grand place," she said.

Not fit for such a grand place! Robert's heart bounded, and the blood tingled through his veins. What did Hester mean, wont as she often was to betray her thoughts with innocent frankness? Has she been thinking of herself as—as—? Robert could not finish the sentence in his own mind. What should he say to her? It would be something excessively significant, or excessively commonplace. How much dare he say to her?

The opportunity of saying anything was snatched from him; for, while he hesitated,

the door opened, and Mr. Waldron made his appearance. He did not see Hester until she rose from her low chair, and then he arrested himself with an exclamation of astonishment.

"Why, Robert! Why, Hester!" he ejaculated.

Robert was never at a loss as to what to say to his father, and now he found himself able to speak fluently.

"I found Miss Morley just come in," he said; "and as she was both cold and agitated by her lonely walk through the park, I brought her in here for a few minutes before taking her into the drawing-room."

"Oh!" was all that Mr. Waldron could at first reply. He knew that his son must have seen Hester at the time that he was lying ill in John Morley's house; but he had no idea that any intimacy could have been founded upon that ill-omened introduction. He recovered, however, from his profound amazement enough to give Hester a most cordial welcome; and then he conducted her himself to join the rest of the party.

It was a more than usually pleasant evening both to Miss Waldron and Robert. She kept

possession of Carl, and paid him every possible attention ; while Robert scarcely quitted Hester's side. This devotion did not escape his sister's observation, but it served her purpose well ; and she could not descry any danger in it. It kept Carl away from Hester, and threw him solely upon her blandishments. Robert's delight in Hester increased hour after hour ; and when the evening was ended, and she had gone away, this time in the carriage, which also contained Carl, he resolved to ask his father's counsel and consent to his marriage with John Morley's daughter before many more days had passed.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HUSBAND FOR HESTER.

FOR several months past Mr. Waldron's first earthly wish had been, as we know, to see his son married. He was satisfied for his daughter to remain unmarried, as she adorned a single life by so much zeal and devotion; and perhaps he was reconciled to it the more readily as his family name would not be transmitted through her to posterity. But already Robert had attained an age when a man grows more difficult to please, and more discriminating as to feminine perfections. Hester ought to have been a hundred-fold more flattered by his preference than she could have been by the love of Carl Bramwell. Mr. Waldron's search after a daughter-in-law, whose price should be above rubies, was becoming an almost despairing pursuit; and Robert gave him no assistance. On the contrary, he appeared to be settling down into an indolent, self-indulgent bachelorhood. The day following that on which he had found Hester seated at Robert's fireside,

with him leaning over her in a lover-like attitude that had struck him with amazement, the father and son walked out amicably together over the farm-lands belonging to Aston Court. Both felt that the time was come when they must speak to one another upon that which occupied their thoughts; and Robert preferred doing so as far from the presence of Miss Waldron as possible. He accompanied his father to the end of a stubble-field, which was to lie fallow during the winter, and then he commenced the conversation in as composed a tone as if he were making some agricultural observations.

"I think, father," he said, "that it is time I married."

Mr. Waldron planted his stick firmly into the soil, as if he intended it to take root there, and gazed anxiously into his son's face.

"To be sure, Robert; to be sure," he cried.

"You were surprised to find Hester alone with me yesterday," he continued.

"I was," replied Mr. Waldron, briefly.

"Father," he resumed, stammering a little, "it was not at all the first time I have seen her of late. We know one another very well. The

fact is I happened to meet with her in the house of an old Frenchwoman."

"You don't mean the mother of John Morley's workman?" interrupted Mr. Waldron.

"Yes," said Robert; "I have met her there many times during the last few months."

"Robert," interrupted his father again, with an expression and tone the most severe he could assume towards him, "you cannot mean to tell me that you, a man of the world, knowing how ready the world is to gossip, can have taken advantage of Hester's ignorance to draw her into a clandestine intercourse with you?"

"I have," owned Robert, in some confusion.

"I wonder how you dare to confess it," continued Mr. Waldron, leaning more heavily upon his stick, as if his son's words had wounded him deeply; "she is so simple, so unsuspecting! She did not know to what censure she exposed herself. Suppose your sister had found it out!"

Mr. Waldron's face wore an aspect of real terror; but Robert smiled a little to himself.

"I took care that nobody should know," he said; "you need not be afraid for Hester. But now you will not be surprised to hear me say that I love her more than any woman I ever

saw ; ay, more than I ever supposed I could love. It seems to me that there can be no love in the world like that I feel for my little Hetty."


Robert's handsome face, with its new air of profound and passionate tenderness, looked handsomer than ever as he spoke ; and his father, regarding him fondly, fancied that any woman would forgive him any previous folly.

" But have you forgotten the past," he said.

" Forgotten it !" he exclaimed ; " have you or my sister suffered me to forget it ? Forget it ! Why I have only to look into Hester's face, with all its sweetness and beauty, and there I see my sin written legibly in its sad lines. How can I forget, when it is Hester herself I love, in spite of everything."

" But what can be done ?" asked Mr. Waldron, despondingly.

" I want to atone to her for all these years she has lost," he answered, with vehement earnestness. " I will make her after-life so bright that she shall forget all her early sorrow. I will lift her out of the miserable confined lot that is hers, and give her a rank and wealth she could never reach without me. If she were



but my wife I should have no fear for her happiness."

"But it is morally impossible," objected Mr. Waldron; "John Morley—"

"He must consent," interrupted Robert, "if I only make sure of Hester. He is very poor, almost to bankruptcy. He is aging fast, and Hester's future must be an anxiety to him. He is already reconciled to you, and has allowed her to visit here, knowing that she must meet me. If you will only help me he will come round in time. He must—he shall."

For a few minutes both father and son were plunged in profound thought. The rooks flew heavily above their heads, disturbed by their presence, and manifesting their discontent by hoarse cawing. The young cattle came near enough to contemplate them with their brown eyes. There was a sharp struggle going on in Mr. Waldron's mind which was scarcely visible in his face, so long accustomed to hide his emotions. He was, as his old minister had told him, a proud man; and he had sometimes regarded John Morley as a person in a very inferior position. John Morley was, in fact, nothing more than a tradesman, and one in

difficult circumstances ; and it was his only son, his heir, who wished to bring the daughter of the poor bookseller into his wealthy family as his wife. Yet Hester was so pretty, so simple, so clever ; she was so good also, that, but for the accident of her birth, there could be no one more worthy of being his daughter-in-law. Besides, Robert was very obstinate if he was opposed. He would refuse to look out for a more suitable wife, if he should deny him his consent and assistance.

"I talked about it with Mr. Watson before his death," said Robert, at last breaking through the silence, "and he said he did not see any insuperable difficulties, or any insurmountable objections in the way. He did not seem to see them so clearly as I did."

"He was a timid man," replied his father, "and would agree to all you said. But how did he come to know of it before me?"

"He saw me once or twice follow Hester into the court," he answered, "and he had courage enough to speak very faithfully on the subject, I assure you. Well, he did not see why Hester should not in time become my wife. He said, however, that it would be

more likely to come to pass if we only knew for certain that poor Rose was dead. It is my firm conviction that she is dead ; but I can get no proofs."

"Robert," said Mr. Waldron, earnestly, "you are losing sight of John Morley's implacable hatred. Ah, my boy! you kept from me the history of that blow which almost killed you last February. It was then you first saw Hester, and fell in love with her. I do not wonder at it. But do you imagine that if he seeks your life, you can ever gain his consent or hers?"

"I think," answered Robert, "that his revenge spent itself in that blow. He is a good man, a religious man. He was hurried by a sudden passion into the attempt to commit that crime; but as it failed,—luckily for me,—he soon repented of it, and was not sorry to extend his kindness to me. We have now something to forgive one another. I am more equal with him, and that is so much in my favour. Why else was he so hospitable and kind towards me? He visited me once, and spoke as a friend would have done. He knew Hester saw me often, and yesterday he allowed

her to come once more to our house. I hardly dared to hope before; but now, with you to help me, I shall win Hester as my wife."

His face, dearer to Mr. Waldron even than that of his daughter, shone with more gladness and hope than had been seen upon it for many years. His father could object no longer, but gave his hand a warm and fervent grasp.

"I will help you, my boy," he said; "yet I had my own little scheme for Hester, and it is possible it may prove in your way now. The moment I set my eyes on young Bramwell, I thought he would make a good husband for the little girl. They were both so young, so good, and so handsome. Our family owes John Morley a compensation, and I fancied I had found it in him. I would have given her a wedding dowry that would have made them almost independent of his church, wherever he goes. But now I hope he will not be in your way."

He looked anxious lest he should himself have destroyed the chances of his son's happiness. Robert also was grave, counting up all the symptoms he had detected of love between Carl and Hester. They were very few,

almost none. It had not escaped his notice that his sister was making herself foolish, as he termed it, about the eloquent young preacher, ten years her junior, and he built some hopes upon that; the more so as Carl came frequently to Aston Court, and spent a good deal of time with Miss Waldron. Under other circumstances he would probably have manifested his disapprobation of such an intimacy with unmistakable plainness, but he hailed it as a sign that Carl preferred his sister's mature piety to Hester's girlish prettiness; and he was more than content to let the intimacy run a smooth course.

"I am not much afraid of him," he said; "yet I should have been quite as well pleased if you had chosen a more commonplace man for Little Aston."

"I chose him for Hester," replied Mr. Waldron in a tone which betrayed a lingering reluctance to abandon his favourite scheme; "they are just suited for each other. I thought so last night. I wish you could give up this notion, Robert."

"Never!" he exclaimed, vehemently. "I tell you I worship her. She is the only woman

who can make me care for goodness or religion, or things of that sort. I have had enough to disgust me with it, but Hester makes it soothing and pleasant again. If I am ever to be anything but the idle, purposeless fellow I am, doing no good in life, it will be by winning Hester."


Mr. Waldron sighed deeply, but he did not attempt to explain his sigh. Robert's state of mind was still, as it had always been, a grief to him; but he had come to the point of no longer pressing religious expostulation upon him. His sigh, however, included something more than that. There was a misgiving in it lest Carl, whom he had brought to Little Aston for the very purpose, had not already gained possession of Hester's love. But deeper still lay an unconquerable dread that it would be impossible to overcome John Morley's instinctive repugnance to give his daughter to the man who had brought so indelible a stigma upon his name. Every one else might plead the youth and thoughtlessness of the college-lad, for Robert had been little more than that; but could it be hoped for that the dishonoured husband should thus excuse him, or could ever

be brought to look upon his conduct as the careless folly of a boy who had not learned to master his passions? They walked homewards in almost unbroken silence, and Mr. Waldron shut himself up in his private room to deliberate upon all the bearings of the matter.

CHAPTER IX.

CONSULTING CARL.

THE more Mr. Waldron considered the subject upon which Robert had consulted with him, the more dubious he grew as to the possibility of winning over John Morley, unless, indeed, Hester's own happiness should depend upon his consent. He endeavoured to place himself in the position of the dishonoured man ; but the power of seeing with other people's eyes cannot be acquired at the age of sixty-eight. He saw his son, handsome, accomplished, and rich, with a brilliant lot to offer ; and he could see Hester clearly, as a very eligible daughter-in-law in every respect, except by birth. There had been always a peculiar softness in his heart towards Hester,—an anticipatory tenderness, perhaps. He would like exceedingly to have her always near to him. But John Morley was, as he always had been, wrapped in an impenetrable mystery. He could no more understand him, members as they were of the same church, than Peter could understand his beloved brother Paul.



Mr. Waldron glanced but briefly towards the world, though, no doubt, it would have something to say to such a marriage. Ten years ago its tongue had been busy with the story of Robert's sin ; and the world has a retentive memory for scandals. It would, perhaps, be easier to pacify John Morley himself than to satisfy its scruples, sometimes more exacting and delicate than those of an individual conscience. But Mr. Waldron was not accustomed to consider the world. He had long since turned his back upon it, and treated its opinions with contempt. If he approved of the matter, and the church supported him, he could very well afford to leave all question of the world out of the transaction.

To make sure of the pastor was one means of securing the approbation of the church. He did not wish to startle or shock that small congregation of faithful men over whom he and Carl Bramwell presided. They were a simple, uncultivated class, not accustomed to split straws, but it was within the bounds of possibility that they might be scandalized by his son's marriage with Hester Morley. There was a broad though undefined code of Christian


better than I can do. There is no burden of sin we may not cast away before the face of the Father."

"But are the consequences to remain?" asked Mr. Waldron. "Is he always to bear the stigma of his sin? Is he not free to act as if he had never been guilty? Ought the transgression to be forgiven by every man as well as by God?"

Carl paused. There was a swift current of sympathy and love running clear and unobstructed through his young spirit which carried him irresistibly towards the side of mercy. He was as yet a mere student in human nature, and had had no actual wrestle with temptation. He had not seen sin face to face. At present it was a veiled and awful form for him; he had not beheld its hideous features, and received the ineffaceable memory upon his heart.

"None of the sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him," he said, in a lowered and reverent voice.

"You yourself would act upon that?" pursued Mr. Waldron. "My son is the same in your eyes as though he never was guilty of this sin?"



"Perhaps not altogether that," answered Carl; "but who among us would enforce a penalty if God does not? If He will make no more mention of his transgression, why should we?"

It was Mr. Waldron's turn to pause and reflect. His anxious face grew darker, and the knotted veins in his forehead became larger. He did not feel quite sure of Robert's repentance, though he longed to believe in it. He wished to believe that his own prayers through so many years had not failed in the court of heaven. Perseverance in an earthly court must have prevailed before this. He argued illogically. Because he had so earnestly prayed that his son might truly repent, his professed repentance must be sincere.

"Mr. Bramwell," he said, suddenly, "what do you think of Hester Morley?"

If Carl had been asked unexpectedly what he thought of the cherubim, he could not have been more stupefied or at a loss. He gazed blankly at Mr. Waldron, and did not reply till that gentleman repeated the question.

"Oh, I think she is very good," he answered, somewhat coldly; "she is a member of the

church, and an excellent daughter. My sister is very much attached to her."

"You have not seen much of her," remarked Mr. Waldron.

"Very little," he replied.

"Would it astonish you," said Mr. Waldron, hesitating; "would it shock you in any way, if you heard that my son, having seen her a good deal while he was ill this spring, was anxious, nay, bent upon making her his wife?"

"Impossible!" ejaculated Carl, starting from his seat as if he had been shot. He took a hasty turn or two across his study, and then came back to his chair opposite his visitor. "I think I must have misunderstood you," he said, with a ghastly effort at a smile. "Did you say that Mr. Robert Waldron wishes to make the daughter of John Morley his wife?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Waldron, briefly.

"It is impossible!" said Carl. "Your son's sin demands great charity from us; but he must not ask Hester to share the burden he has to bear all his life long. Oh, it would not be possible!"

"But is my son never to marry?" asked Mr. Waldron.

"Yes," cried Carl. "Let him find some one with a spirit which would not be bowed down by such a burden. But Hester is too young, too ignorant of life, too simple-hearted. He would do well with a wife like his sister, strong in her own faith, and able to fight with him against his spiritual foes. Why should Hester's young and innocent heart be joined to one which must ever bear the sting of a sore repentance?"

"You are a young man, yourself," said Mr. Waldron, as Carl paused; "a very young man. There are scores, hundreds of marriages,—ay, and happy ones,—where there has been an early folly like this. Hester would be rich, happy, and beloved. If John Morley should be reconciled to Robert, he would become a member of our church, and would be ready to take my place in it when I am gone. Moreover, there was a something in Hester's manner last night which makes me hope that she is not averse to Robert. You may have seen it yourself—a pretty, pensive, gentle pleasure in listening to him."

"Yes," replied Carl, who had watched Hester furtively during the whole of the previous even-

ing, and who had seen every little gesture and every expression of enjoyment that had escaped her.

"Then, if she loves him," resumed Mr. Waldron, "and if that folly of his youth should not be remembered against him now he is a man, I see no impediment to their marriage. I see in it rather a compensation for the past. If John Morley's poverty and shame have come from us, surely the honour of marrying his daughter into our family ought to balance it. Do you agree with me?"

Carl's restless hand moved absently among his papers. His face had grown pale, and his bright keen sight, dim. Until this moment he had looked at John Morley's misery from the outside. By temperament he was profoundly sympathetic, and was touched to the quick by the feelings of others. But by this very law of his nature he had regarded John Morley and his exaggerated grief from the point of view of the Waldrons, with whom he had been most closely associated. He had placed himself in the position of Robert, and pleaded for him all the excuses he would have sought for himself. But now he seemed to

look into the very heart of John Morley,—that heart on fire, as Grant had once called it. That Hester Morley should love Robert Waldron ! That she should ever become his wife ! He pushed away the hair which had fallen over his forehead, and gazed fixedly at Mr. Waldron, who said, “Do you think with me ?”

“I think,” cried Carl, in an irrepressible frenzy, “that the idea is monstrous ! There are some sins which cannot be forgotten. It would be a horrible thing, an unheard-of thing.”

“Perhaps you love Hester yourself,” Mr. Waldron suggested.

Carl hastened to regain his self-control. Mr. Waldron’s face was one of sharp and anxious scrutiny ; and he did not wish to subject himself to any more pointed questions.

“I was thinking of her father only,” he answered ; “I believe that to him it will appear more monstrous than it does to me.”

“Carl,” said Mr. Waldron, in an accent of pity, “I like you ; ay, I honour and trust you. In bringing you here I thought it probable that you would love Hester. But this is my son’s whole chance of happiness ; perhaps for the life to come as well as this. It may be his

salvation. You possess a better and holier happiness. Promise me, at least, that you will not use your influence against him."

"I have, perhaps, no right to influence her," answered Carl, sighing; "but I will commit her to His care who judges all men. If my prayers can shield her from peril, they shall not fail her."


His heart sank a little after he had given this implied promise to stand aside while she was tempted with all that ambition and love could offer her. The sole weapons he could use in her defence were the prayers and teachings she would listen to from his mouth in the public services of the chapel.

CHAPTER X.

HOW COULD IT END?

SCARCELY had Mr. Waldron closed the house-door after himself, having considerably forbidden Carl to quit his warm room, when a light rap at his study-door recalled Carl from his painful reflections upon the interview which had just ended. The second intruder was Annie, who carried a little work-basket in her hand, and came in boldly, with an air which plainly announced that she intended staying with him for a time.

"Now, Carl," she said, "it is all nonsense you pretending you can study with that dreadful cold. My husband,"—she uttered the word with a little bridling of the head, which showed that the title was still a new one,—“has been called out, and does not expect to be home till late. He said I was to come here and sit with you, and you were on no account to leave this room till bedtime. So I am going to order tea up here, and we will have a nice, quiet, cosy evening together, you dear old boy.”




She rang for the servant to bring the tea-tray and bright brass kettle upstairs, and was very busy for a time in making the tea and toast by Carl's fire. He sat upon the hearth, watching her with dimmed eyes and a colourless face. Annie was quick-sighted, and the weariness of his expression did not escape her.

"Are you going to talk to me, Carl, or shall I talk to you?" she asked.

"I would a great deal rather you talked to me," he answered.

"I shall not say anything very wise, and I shall gossip," she said, threateningly.

Carl leaned back in his chair, and stretched his feet out towards the fire. He could not make conversation, even to Annie, that night. His mind was very busy, but very rambling, darting from one point to another of his interview with Mr. Waldron. Yet he was not sorry that Annie had invaded his solitude, and that her voice should prattle through the confusion of his thoughts. Now and then he caught a sentence of her lively gossip, and answered by a word or two. On her part she was weaving a very skilful and subtle web by which she might entrap his most secret sentiments; but



she might as well have gone directly to her point, so insensible was he to her delicate handling.

"She is very fond of me," said Annie, in a tone of great significance; and, as he was thinking at the moment of Hester, the words startled him. "She said last night she loved me like a sister."

"I am very glad to hear it," he answered, earnestly.

"I wonder how old she is," remarked Annie.

Carl knew to a day Hester's age. She was four years and three months younger than himself. He had seen the date of her birthday in a book which had been given to her years ago, but he did not give his sister the information she desired.

"She perhaps looks younger than she is," said Annie; "I think she is very good; don't you, Carl?"

"Yes," he answered, in a very subdued tone.

"And she thinks you," continued his sister, "the very best, the very first, the most eloquent of men and ministers. Of course I agreed with her, but she said I was never to tell you so, Carl."

Carl's face grew crimson, and with the gesture most familiar to him, he shaded his eyes with his long hand; there were tears, he could not tell why, standing in them. Annie nestled to his side, and laid her head upon his shoulder.

"Dear old fellow," she said, "I daren't quite say that she is in love with you; but she is not far from it. And I am not quite sure that I should like it altogether. She is not exactly what I fancied your wife would be. I should think she cannot be less than six or seven years older than you; but she is very good and very rich, and her father is a great man among our people. Still I am not quite sure that I should like my brother Carl to become her husband."

Carl had suffered too severe a shock that evening to be staggered by this one. The deep flush faded gradually away from his face, and the tears dried under his eyelids, but he could not command his voice sufficiently to speak to Annie.

"So now," she said, kissing him affectionately, "your mind is prepared for it. I don't believe you have vanity enough for the notion to enter your head of itself, clever as you are. It would

be a very grand thing for you, but I don't exactly see how it would turn out in the end. You are very fond of her, Carl."

"She is my friend," he answered, with parched lips and dry throat.

"Ah, yes!" said Annie, sagely; "but everybody knows what such friendships generally come to. I don't mean, Carl, that you might not go on very comfortably as a friend; but Miss Waldron will not. Mark my words, and make up your mind about it. Only if I were you, unless I really cared for her, I would not let her come here so often. I should think you could easily put a check upon that. It is not nice generally for men to marry women older than themselves, but she is everything else you like; isn't she? I wonder what Mr. Waldron and Mr. Robert will think of it!"

Carl felt glad that his sister's head was still lying upon his shoulder, and that she could not see his face. A profound sense of the derision with which at times life seems to flout and make a mock at us, filled his mind, and he laughed a short hoarse laugh, which grated upon his sister's ear.

"Why do you laugh, Carl?" she asked.

"I was laughing at Mr. Waldron," he answered, checking himself.


"Why," continued Annie, "would you really marry Miss Waldron if you were sure she would marry you? I was talking to Hester this morning; she came up here to fetch a book she had lent me, and I asked her if she had noticed anything peculiar in her manner last night."

"What did she answer?" asked Carl, with increasing interest.

"She was shy, as she always is, of speaking out her mind; but she said there was no doubt Miss Waldron was very fond of you."

"Fond of me!" repeated Carl. "Did Hester say anything else?"

"She said what a pious woman Miss Waldron is," continued Annie; "everybody says the same. But now, my dear boy, do not be rash in any way. I am a whole year older than you, and I'm married, you know; so listen to what I have to say to you. A great many pious women are excessively disagreeable, I can tell you; they are so good that it does not seem worth while to be amiable. They may have a good deal of treasure laid up, but they have no



small change for everyday use. One of your great divines said himself, that good nature was sometimes better than grace in a wife. Now I am afraid I have not so much treasure laid up as Miss Waldron, but I am not unpleasant to live with ; at least James says so. Don't be in any hurry, in any way."

Carl fell into a train of troubled thoughts again. His friendship for Miss Waldron was pure and chivalrous, founded upon the gratitude he felt for her very gracious and flattering regard for himself. No idea that she cherished a sentiment one degree warmer than his own would ever have entered his mind, had not Annie placed it so plainly before him. But now that his eyes were opened he saw it distinctly, and knew that he could never be blind again. He passed in review the incidents of the preceding evening, and then his thoughts were brought round once more to the first painful subject which had occupied them.

"Annie," he said, in a very low and troubled voice, "do you think it possible for Hester ever to love Robert Waldron?"

"It looked very like it last night, Carl," she answered, gravely.


"But, good heavens!" cried Carl, forgetting his disapprobation of any words at all approaching the nature of an oath, "the thing is impossible."

"I have been thinking about it all the morning," resumed Annie, "and I partly understand how it can be. Hester has lived so apart from the world that she is still like a child in many things; and, Carl, as for sin! why, she looks at it as the angels might do. Of course we are bound to believe her corrupt and sinful, and all that sort of thing, I suppose; but I say that Hester no more knows how to distinguish between sin and sin than an angel would. It is clear that Robert Waldron does not shock her in any way, but that she is rather attracted by him than otherwise. I saw her look at him, once or twice yesterday, with the open-eyed, wondering, unconscious gaze of a child. But at other times her eyes sank, and her face coloured when he was talking to her. I am afraid she might love him."

"But what could be the end of it?" asked Carl, in a sharp accent.

"Ah! how could it end?" repeated Annie.

She raised her head from his shoulder, and



turned her ear listening towards the window. There was a distant sound of hoof-beats coming on at a rapid rate, and a bright smile broke upon her face. She kissed Carl hastily, bidding him go to bed early that night, and left him to the undisturbed course of his meditations.

CHAPTER XI.

A DIRECT EFFORT.

FROM the time that Miss Waldron had become acquainted with the fact that a Popish French-woman dwelt in idolatrous darkness within sight of the very walls of the chapel, where the gospel was preached every Sunday, though in a language unknown to her, she had resolved upon making her the subject of one of those direct efforts which had often so signal an effect upon the poor women of her district and mothers' meetings. She ordered from John Morley a packet of English tracts translated into French, and with these and a French Bible in her large satchel, she sallied forth, the morning after her father's interview with Carl, to seek the dwelling of the benighted foreigner.

It was about midday, and Madame Lawley was regaling herself with a savoury ragout, highly-seasoned with garlic, which she was wont to have cooked in her landlady's oven. She had added to her repast a glass or two of good Burgundy, supplied to her by Robert

Waldron, which she could only take at those meals when her son was absent, for fear of his discovering the secret of her distinguished visitor. She was in her most exhilarated mood. The noonday happened to be one of the rarely bright moments of November, and the high window of her garret caught the sunshine, while all the court below was in gloom. There was no fire in the grate, but a warm chaufferette, filled with wood-ashes from the oven, stood under her feet. The three little bronze crucifixes over the empty fireplace shone full in the brightest of the sunbeams, and were the first objects upon which Miss Waldron's eyes fell as she entered the garret.

Miss Waldron had not the proficiency in French which her brother possessed. She had never been out of her native isle, and her father, entertaining a true old-fashioned British contempt of foreigners, had never invited any to his house. Her acquaintance with the language was, in consequence, almost limited to a perusal of Telemachus and the works of Madame de Genlis, which she had gone through with her dictionary and a master. Madame received her with a torrent of patois, of which

"He is my brother," she answered, slowly, and with some difficulty, as she pondered over a totally unprepared phrase. She had arranged beforehand a conversation which ought to have proceeded like a catechism, but she was completely thrown out. She stammered and hesitated, but at last she was compelled to put her question in a bald, unvarnished manner. "Does he meet a girl called Hester Morley here?" she asked.

The smooth clean face of Madame assumed the innocence of a child, combined with virtuous indignation. She answered firmly in the negative, with a gesture of utter repudiation; but Miss Waldron's aroused suspicions were not to be rocked to sleep again. Hester came here, and she had learned that Robert did so too. What could it mean? Could it have any meaning but one?

"I am afraid," she said, in very incorrect French, for she was agitated and her tongue tingled to speak in strong English, "that you are a very wicked woman. I knew you were a Papist and a Frenchwoman, but I am afraid you are worse. I came here with the purpose of doing you good, but I fear it is impossible.

I shall speak about you to my father, Mr. Waldron, of Aston Court, who is a magistrate."

Madame Lawson could not understand many words of this speech, but she could see that her visitor was very greatly displeased. It occurred to her that she had come on a mission of suspicion and espionage, and she resolved to throw her off the scent. Her brown eyes,—eyes which betray nothing, met Miss Waldron's gaze, and a sinister air of intelligence spread over her face.

"Mademoiselle Hester comes to see me sometimes," she said, very distinctly, "but never, oh, never, when milord Robert comes. There is a young priest at the chapel, where mademoiselle makes her prayers; and in England the priests marry. He is very handsome and young, like Mademoiselle Hester. It is possible he may marry himself with her."

Miss Waldron's heart sank very low. That such a calamity was possible she could not conceal from herself; but it had never been put into words and uttered in her hearing. She was lost in distressed and perplexed thought, not able to ply the old woman with clever questions. Madame regarded her with

a crafty smile. Grant had once brought Carl to see her, but the visit had made little impression upon her, except as awakening an odd interest in the priest who could marry if he chose. She was conscious that she had made a happy hit, though she did not know exactly where it wounded.

"Does Hester love the young priest?" asked Miss Waldron at last, unable to cloak the enquiry more skilfully.

"It is necessary to love one's director," she answered, with a leer full of insinuation; "and he is so handsome, like *la petite*. It is also his duty to love all his people."

Both Madame and Miss Waldron had been too engrossed to catch the sound of the staircase creaking under a footstep; but at this moment a sallow and withered face, with two eyes set in it like burning lamps, appeared at the half-open door. Madame uttered a little scream, and dexterously snatched the bottle of Burgundy from the table, putting it by a sleight of hand, into its hiding-place under her bed. But the new comer paid no attention to her movements. He had taken off his old paper cap, and fastened upon Miss Waldron

a gaze which did not permit his eyelids to wink. She experienced a very peculiar sensation of discomfort under the fixed scrutiny of these burning eyes.

"It is my son, Madame," said Lawson's mother, introducing him with an air of ceremony.

"Can you speak English, my good man?" inquired Miss Waldron.

"Certainly," replied Lawson; "but before we go any further, may I ask what your name is?"

"Miss Waldron, of Aston Court," she said, with emphasis and dignity.

"So I guessed," he cried, clenching his hands; "you are a lady, and I'd be sorry to frighten you. But it is as much as your life is worth to come here. I am Mr. Morley's workman, and love Miss Hester. I knew her mother and the second Mrs. Morley. Now you'll see you'd better not come here again. This is my house, and I will have nobody in it belonging to you or yours."

"I came here to convert your mother," said Miss Waldron, with great courage.

"Then she must go unconverted," he said,

his tone rising to a higher pitch. "If you and yours are to go to heaven, then me and mine must go elsewhere. It is not safe for you here. John Morley and me are waiting,—waiting till the right time comes; for there is deadly hatred betwixt us and you. You had better go at once, while I warn you. I'm a quiet man, but you had better go."

His voice had risen shrilly with each sentence, till now it rang in her ears with a shriek, which the children at play below heard, and stopped suddenly to listen. Miss Waldron seized her satchel and fled; and, as she hurried through the court, the window above was opened violently, and her loosened packet of tracts fluttered down about her like a flock of frightened doves.

CHAPTER XII.

SOMETHING MORE THAN A FRIEND.

As Miss Waldron issued from the low passage leading to the court, Carl was hurrying past with long strides, and with his head bowed down as if heavy with momentous thoughts. She uttered a cry of joyful relief, and almost flung herself upon his arm. There was so evident a fright, both in her flurried manner and the startled expression on her face, that Carl gazed about him and peered down the narrow alley to ascertain the cause of it. She sobbed hysterically; and having sufficient presence of mind to take advantage of the opportunity, she did not attempt to control her agitation, as she must have done had she been compelled to pursue her way alone, or had she met any other acquaintance. She leaned heavily and helplessly upon the arm of the embarrassed Carl. The street was quiet, but he glanced up and down it with a feeling of dismay. There needed but one or two observant passers-by to attract a whole crowd

about them from the surrounding houses. The key of the chapel vestry was in his pocket, and the chapel was on the other side of the street.

"Would you like to sit down for a few minutes in the vestry?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, yes!" said Miss Waldron, between her sobs.

Carl led her across the street, and once again he cast a keen glance about him. There were only a few children to be seen at play. But no; coming up the pavement was a light and tall figure, dressed in a soft gray dress which he knew very well to be Hester's. She was on the sunny side of the street, dazzled perhaps by the white wintry sunshine; for she did not seem to see them in the shade, though he was a long time in fitting the key into the lock, in the hope that she would recognise them, and he could make a sign to her to come across to them. Miss Waldron did not see her.

"There is Miss Morley," said Carl; "shall I run over and call her to come to you?"

"No," answered Miss Waldron, plainly enough, and without a sob this time; "I

would much rather not see her at this moment. I have something very extraordinary to tell you, Carl."

The name Carl seemed to fall from her lips unconsciously in her state of excitement; but he felt a nervous tremor at the sound of it. He opened the vestry door and went in, with Miss Waldron still supporting herself upon his arm. He placed her in his own chair beside the table, and stood opposite to her before the empty fireplace. Above it hung usually the portrait of a distinguished divine of their denomination, in a full-bottomed wig and white bands, at the back of which was a small looking-glass, where the pastor of the church could take a stealthy glimpse of himself before ascending the pulpit. Carl had turned the portrait with its face to the wall the preceding Sunday; and now, instead of the smooth and pious physiognomy of the eminent minister, he saw his own troubled features, with the straight eyebrows knitted and the lips pressed sternly together. Miss Waldron began to sob less deeply, but she sat with her head averted, and with an air of modest confusion which almost drove him frantic.

"Do you feel better?" he asked. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I am better," she answered, faintly; "in a minute or two I will tell you all."

For that minute or two Carl set himself to conquer his impatience and irritation. Why should he feel so different to-day from what he had felt only the day before yesterday? She was his friend still; and he had only heard Annie's partial, and no doubt absurd, notion that she was something more than a friend. A true friendship between man and woman ought to be able to bear a greater shock than the misapprehension and misconstruction of others. He almost detested himself for the ready and ridiculous vanity which had caused him to give credence to the story; yet the hot blood mounted to his beating temples as he caught a sidelong glance from Miss Waldron.

"Carl," she said, in a voice as if it was still necessary to gasp for breath at each word, "I may call you Carl now, I think."

What could he answer? He bowed his head gravely, but without raising his eyes from the floor.

"I am a little older than you," she continued,

with a frank air, "and I am so used to hear your dear sister call you Carl. That is how I have slipped into it. To call you Mr. Bramwell now would seem formal. I am thankful it is only you who have seen my agitation. It is foolish and silly, I know, but then I am nothing but a weak foolish woman."

"You have been very much alarmed," remarked Carl, falteringly.

"Oh, exceedingly!" exclaimed Miss Waldron, her hand pressed upon her heart; "and I am so grateful to the Providence which sent you here at this moment. It is but another proof that our steps are all numbered."

On his part Carl felt no particular thankfulness for having been found on the spot at that special moment; but he rebuked the thought as it suggested itself to him.

"I must tell you all," said Miss Waldron, "but to you only. It must be a secret between us two. I would not have my father made uneasy for the world; and if I need any counsel or protection, you will give me both. I can count upon you, dear Carl."

"Certainly," he replied.

Miss Waldron's narrative contained several

details not to be found in the preceding chapter, all tending to cast a lustre on her own conduct, such as might be supposed by an uncharitable spirit to have existed only in her own imagination. She omitted also the mention of Madame's suggestion with respect to Carl himself, though she was tearfully eloquent in connection with her suspicions concerning her brother and Hester being in the habit of seeing one another in the old Frenchwoman's garret. Here Carl possessed a knowledge of which Miss Waldron was ignorant; and nothing appeared more probable to him than that Robert Waldron had seized upon any opportunity of meeting Hester. But that she should consent to these clandestine interviews was a sure, convincing proof that he had won her affection; and she had fallen into the snare through dread of her father. Could this be the sorrow which old Mr. Watson had foreseen for Hester? Had he received some hint of the miserable attachment she had formed? What could he do in the matter?

With his darkened face reflected in the little sacred mirror, Carl let these first thoughts run riot in his brain, while Miss Waldron meandered

on in a gently purling stream of sentiment, which, to speak the truth, did more credit to her heart than her head, and which murmured idly against Carl's ear as a brook laps unheeded against the granite base of a rock. He had no notion of what she was saying. He was dethroning the image of Hester from its pure, sweet, girlish supremacy, and setting it beside the image of Robert Waldron. The mere thought of such a union shocked him. He turned away from it with revulsion, as if it were a crime. It flashed suddenly across him that Hester had been intended for him; he knew it, and felt sure of it. Their spirits were of one kind; their hearts beat with the same pulse. If she had only waited a little longer before surrendering the treasure of her love! But she had cast away her pearls, and had no longer any to bestow upon him to whom they would have been wealth beyond price.

Carl suffered more intense pain this morning than he had done the night before while listening to Mr. Waldron. There had been the consolation of doubt then, but there was none now. Hester met Robert clandestinely, and it must be because she loved him.

"I ought not to have been alarmed, even then," said Miss Waldron; "I ought to have stayed myself upon a promise."

"Certainly," replied Carl, not hearing what she said.

"But I am only a feeble woman," she continued; "we are not like you others, with your strong minds. I am afraid you will despise me for the future."

She had never before pleaded her feminine feebleness, but now she looked up to him with an appealing and helpless gaze. From Hester's eyes such a glance would have penetrated the profoundest depths of his heart; but from Miss Waldron it had no such effect.

"Despise you!" he said. "Oh, no! why should I? No doubt you had cause for alarm."

"And you will esteem me, and—and care for me as much as ever?" she asked, with a recurring sob.

"To be sure," he replied; "why do you trouble yourself afresh, Miss Waldron? There is no more cause for fear. As soon as you feel yourself equal to the exertion, I will see you safe home."

"Carl," she said, in a bashful and hesitating tone, "if you really feel that we are friends, and especially now we have a secret between us, and I have only you to look to for advice and protection, I wish you would leave off calling me Miss Waldron. You may call me by my name, Sophia."

"But nobody calls you Sophia," exclaimed Carl, with alarmed earnestness.

"But I will allow you to do so," she answered, condescendingly; "it is less distant, and more friendly. To the rest of the world I remain Miss Waldron; to you I am Sophia."

Carl murmured his thanks indistinctly. It needed a great effort to save him from a lack of courtesy. But she was a good woman, a member of his church, a lady, and the daughter of his patron. All these titles gave her so many claims to his respect; and even if it were true, as Annie had intimated, that she distinguished him with her preference, that was no reason whatever why he should treat her with impoliteness or ill-temper. There was a mingled sense of shame and sorrow for her which lent to his manner a sufficient gentleness to blind Miss Waldron's eyes, already dazzled with self-

importance. She intimated that she was now ready to undertake the walk home; and leaning confidently, but not too heavily, upon his arm, they traversed together the watchful streets of Little Aston and the glades of the park, while unutterable sentiments filled the heart of Sophia Waldron.

CHAPTER XIII.

TEN YEARS AFTER.

It was a noticeable sight, and one fraught with tacit inferences, which had greeted Hester's eyes as she turned the corner of the street and saw Carl and Miss Waldron about to enter the chapel vestry upon a day and hour when there was neither a public service nor a more private meeting of any kind. She had not chosen to recognise them; for the question asked by Annie, whether she had not observed something peculiar in Miss Waldron's manner towards Carl, had been rankling in her mind ever since; and the pain it created there set her on her guard, both against herself and them. She was in a transition state of moods and emotions, of which she could not breathe a word to any one. From the first moment her eyes had looked upon Carl's face, with its fine, clear, happy, and good aspect, so differing in its charm from the handsomer features of Robert Waldron, she had felt that there were other classes of men in the world than those

she had met in her narrow sphere. Hitherto she had found no man stronger in nature than herself; for in her heart of hearts Hester knew herself less weak in the presence of trial and temptation than any of the people about her, with the exception, perhaps, of Grant. She was, though Mr. Waldron and Robert did not suspect it, little pliable to outer influences, and not easily moulded into a form foreign to herself. But Carl was stronger than she. She looked up to him from beneath the long fringe of her brown eye-lashes, mentally acknowledging him her superior. Sunday after Sunday she listened to him critically, and never caught a false tone or an affected one. She found her mind pondering over his thoughts, and confessing her belief in them. She began to feel as if she was his sole listener; the congregation might be there, but they could not comprehend him as she did.

A very sweet and subtle impression had taken hold of her, that Carl had been more eloquent for her than for any one else in his church. Now and then, when he had allowed his genius a higher flight than ordinary, and had soared far above the heads of his simple

flock, his kindled eye had sought hers, and held it in a fascinated gaze, while he elaborated and concluded his thought; and there had seemed a secret understanding between them, more perfect than that of words. But now Hester discovered that there was a second listener, with whom, perhaps, Carl had a still more intimate and delicate unison; who might have the privilege of suggesting the themes of his eloquence, and who certainly could converse with him familiarly about his sermons. When Annie had plainly hinted at Miss Waldron's preference for her brother, Hester, yielding to a very natural and feminine feeling of jealousy, had observed that she was a very pious woman. It was all she could say. To her Miss Waldron had ceased to be imposing or clever, and she had never appeared engaging. Hester scarcely cared to put herself into comparison with her on the score of beauty; and she felt that she was her superior mentally. But in goodness? In the one thing needful to a good man like Carl, how far she fell behind the acknowledged saint of the Church at Little Aston!

Hester humiliated herself all that afternoon;

and, in consequence, was not so pleasant a companion to Lawson as usual. She set vigorously to work to root out the tares from her heart, one of them being her young love for Carl. She made a number of vows, every one difficult of performance. Her busy hands did not pause because of the inward storm; but Lawson saw more than one tear stealing down her cheeks as she smoothed the gold leaf with her delicate fingers. He was himself excited, and could scarcely refrain from telling Hester of the occurrence of the morning. But her cloudy brow, and her mouth set into a firm line of decision and of secret conflict, silenced him. During the last few months she had grown out of the pensive and almost timid child into a mistress, who was gentle and gracious in her manner it was true, but who knew her own dignity and upheld it. When she spoke to him this afternoon, her voice was set in a clear but mournful key; and her words were few. Lawson did not dare to tell her how he had encountered Miss Waldron in his mother's room, and had forbidden her ever to intrude there again. He would leave it for Madame to relate in her own way.

At six o'clock Hester descended from the work-room and made tea for her father, still busy with herself. She could not decide whether she would go to the week-night service at chapel, or stay at home to pursue her melancholy task of rooting up the tares. She debated the point until it was almost too late, and then she dressed herself in a panic, and sped in frantic haste up the dark street. The fine morning had merged into an evening of thick, cold rain, which was falling heavily, and splashed upon the pavement as she hurried along. Scarcely a creature was to be seen. Here and there a resolute worshipper, like herself, was trudging along under a wet umbrella, but she knew that the congregation would be a small one. And then it all at once occurred to her, with a chill colder than the rain, that very probably Carl himself would be absent, as he was not very well. She stopped at the door to regain her breath, and to listen if she could hear his voice within. Two or three persons passed her ; one of them a poor woman shabbily dressed in a widow's garb, who paused to look inquisitively at her from under her rusty crape veil. Then Hester went in,

caught for a moment the full, grave, searching gaze of Carl from his low reading-desk, and going on to her accustomed seat, she sank upon her knees, with a strange, almost intolerable, sense of pain.

For once Hester did not hear a word of Carl's sermon, though she caught the sadness and unwonted languor of his voice. As she left the chapel she saw the carriage from Aston Court still waiting at the door, though Mr. and Miss Waldron were already seated in it. She crossed over the street, and hid in the archway of the court opposite, simply to wound herself with the sight of Carl driving away with her rival. While she stood in the rain and the darkness, he would be whirled off in comfort and luxury. Hester felt for the first time how poor she was. Miss Waldron was rich as well as good, and Carl had made a wise choice. The worldly sneer had scarcely risen to her lips when she shrank from it instinctively, and drove the suspicion back to the unworthy regions from whence it had come to assail her. She watched the little congregation dropping away by twos and threes; and she suddenly recalled to mind a childish play of the lost

Rose, who had often amused her by watching the creeping sparks die out of a smouldering piece of paper. Why did the memory of Rose return to her now? Carl was just coming out of chapel, the last of all, and ran through the rain to the carriage, into which he sprang with the freedom and familiarity of one quite at home with those inside. She saw it roll away down the street, and then she prepared to follow, slowly and sorrowfully, through the beating of the storm.

But had Carl been the last to leave the chapel, where a few lamps were still burning, though they were being put out one by one? Hester cast a last look towards it, and saw the poor widow in her shabby mourning, sitting desolately upon one of the steps of the portico. She was in a mood for lingering. She was in a mood, too, for pity and compassion towards any form of suffering. There was also a fine, and very insidious sense of pleasure in the idea of engaging in some good work, while Miss Waldron was wrapped in luxury and enjoyment. She would be, for the moment, beating her on her own ground. Hester recrossed the street. The stranger was crouch-

ing upon the lowest step, with the rain driving full upon her. She seemed to have reached this place, and then fallen, for she was lying along the stone in an attitude of complete helplessness. Hester stooped, and laid her hand gently on her shoulder.

"Are you ill?" she asked, in soothing tones. "You must not lie here in the rain. If you tell me where your home is, I will take you there under my umbrella."

To walk through the wet streets with a friendless and poverty-stricken stranger on her arm would be a vast triumph over Miss Waldron in her carriage, with Carl by her side.

The woman shuddered, and shrank from the light touch of Hester's hand, crouching lower and lower upon the ground. She had looked up from under the veil at Hester's face, upon which the lamp still lit in the entrance of the chapel was shining. Then she gave utterance to a sob, a suppressed cry, a moan wrung from the extreme anguish of a suffering spirit. She stretched out her hand towards Hester, but did not touch her, in a mute gesture which awoke within her a vague alarm.

"Speak to me," cried Hester: "are you ill? What can I do for you?"

As she spoke the last light was extinguished in the chapel, and the outer doors were closed and fastened by some person within. The noise seemed to arouse the stranger. She rose to her feet, but staggered, and fell back against one of the large, square pillars of the portico.

The continued silence and the agitation of this woman gave a shape to Hester's vague suspicions. A quick terror and chill ran through her frame. The darkness which now gathered about them was a welcome veil; a screen behind which might be acted scenes that must shun the day. The rain also, and the emptiness of the street, seemed to draw closer the curtain which ought to conceal the wretched creature at her side.

"Tell me only who you are," she whispered, in a tone of mingled pity and terror.

"Hester!" moaned the shadow, which she could scarcely distinguish in the dense darkness of the night; and there was no need for any other word to pass through the faltering lips.

Hester sank down upon the steps, and with blank, bewildered eyes, gazed into the

blackness which hemmed them in. The poor lost Rose had come back at last! The sinful woman whom she had urged Robert Waldron to seek out, and whose mysterious disappearance had been a continual care to her. Her father's wife stood beside her! She felt her cheeks burn and her veins tingle. Now she had a vision of her sin which she had never had before. For a few minutes her woman's heart,—a heart which had known womanhood but for a little time,—cried out in strong condemnation of the sinner, as well as the sin. She felt that she could not forgive her all at once; nor speak to her any words except those of a righteous anger and abhorrence. She knew now that she ought not to have married her father at all, unless she had felt for him such a love as would have lifted her up for ever out of reach of the temptation by which she had fallen.

Yet, thought Hester, after the first paroxysm was over, had not God brought them together thus, on the very threshold of His own house of prayer, to teach her that if He did not cast her out, neither ought she, who might herself be tempted, and who was not

without sin? She bowed her head upon her hands, and a passionate prayer went up from her burdened heart for help and wisdom in this hour of extreme need.

"What am I to do with you?" she asked, speaking at last to the silent and motionless figure at her side,—standing there like a voiceless ghost from some other world, which could utter no word until a question was put to it.

"Oh Hester!" she cried, "I could live no longer without seeing you and my home. You cannot think what it is to be away ten years, and never hear a word, not a syllable, of those who belong to you. Would my husband forgive me do you think? Only so far as to let me hear him say so before I die? I cannot live very long. Is he less angry with me? Does he ever speak of me?"

"No," said Hester; "he has not forgiven you. He never mentions your name."

"Oh, my God!" wailed the lost woman; "but I must get his forgiveness before I die. What is to become of me? I want to hide somewhere; anywhere out of Robert's reach. He is trying to find me; and I vowed to God when I left him that I would never, never look

upon his face again. Do you know why? God keep you ever from a repentance like mine. Shelter me somewhere, little Hetty; hide me. You promised once that you would be always like my own daughter to me. Hester, you could not turn away from your mother, however sinful she had been."

The doleful words were wailed into Hester's ear, as she still gazed into the darkness. Rose had crept towards her, and stolen her arms round her waist. She did not push away the clinging arms, but she could not answer.

"I am very young still," murmured Rose; "no older than Miss Waldron, who was at chapel just now. I thought your father would be there, and I should see how changed he was. I am going to die, Hester. Yesterday the doctor in London said there was no hope for me; so I resolved to come back home, to you and my husband. He is a just man, and a merciful man. He cannot help but forgive me before I die. I believe that Jesus has pardoned all my sins."

In the voice of Rose, which was one to be remembered for a lifetime, there was a tone of hope as she spoke the last sentence, and she pressed her arms more closely about Hester.

"Yes," she said ; " I was very wretched, and I thought, when I did not see your father to-night, had I not better go back to London, and end my life quickly as women like me do. But then the preacher spoke, and a strange, strange peace entered into me. He looked towards me, where I sat behind you, Hetty, and he said, 'Our souls have no sins which the charity of Christ cannot cover.' Then I resolved to trust myself to the charity of Christ, and to yours, little Hetty."

Her voice was lost in sobs, long-drawn and painful, and her head sank upon Hester's lap. Hester's hand fell softly, with its cold touch, upon the fevered forehead.

"If Christ will receive you," she said, with a thrill of awe as she looked up into the dark sky, as though she half expected to see a light from heaven breaking through the black clouds, "who am I that I should cast you off? I will give you shelter for this night at least."

Yet she did not move, nor help Rose to rise, but let her still lie there sobbing, with her face, which no eye could have seen, buried in her lap, as if she would fain hide it even from the night. Hester was thinking of Robert Waldron,

in his luxurious home, repenting with a comfortable penitence, which left him free for many pleasures, and which was scarcely more than a welcome gloom, where he could withdraw when the brightness of his life wearied him. But this misery, this poverty-stricken, ill clad, friendless, dying misery, was the true result of the sin of which both had been alike guilty. She shuddered, and Rose felt it ; for she loosed her clinging arms, and would have fallen lower at her feet, had not Hester's hand pressed her head down gently upon its resting-place, as a mother's hand caresses the bowed head of a sorrowful child. She had forgotten the cold and the rain, or felt them only as fitting better this dreary hour than light and cloudless skies would have done. But now her hand fell upon the wet clothes of the woman whom she had promised to shelter, a woman upon whom the doom of death had been passed. She lifted Rose up tenderly, and drew her trembling arm through her own. No eye saw them. Not one of their town's-people met them in the deserted street. In the darkness and dreariness of a winter's night Rose Morley returned to her husband's house.

CHAPTER XIV.

HER HUSBAND'S HEARTH.

THERE was on the left hand of the house-door an empty room which was rarely entered, and Hester left Rose there until her father and the young girl whom she kept as her only servant should be gone to bed. It was already near the hour when John Morley retired to his own chamber, where he sometimes read or wrote until later on in the night. Hester took off her wet cloak, and went into the room where he was sitting alone. There was a newly-quickenened love mingled with a dread of him, stirring in her heart. The gray, despairing face, and the silvery hair of her father touched her to the quick this evening. She stood behind him for a minute or two, and then laid her hand, which had so lately rested upon Rose's forehead, upon the snow-white head. It was the very attitude and caress of Rose herself on that day, now many years ago, which had never died out of John Morley's memory; and he laid his head down upon the desk

before him, with a sigh of profound regret and despair.

"Father," cried Hester, earnestly, and kneeling down beside him, "is there nothing that can make you happy? Is there nothing that could happen to bring you comfort?"

John Morley shook his head in silence.

"But this is horrible," she said. "Surely, surely God never meant you to pass your life in a grief like this. Surely He has kept some consolation in His hands for you."

"All things are possible with Him," he answered; "but yet holier men than I have passed through long lives under blacker clouds than mine. There was Cowper. God has not smitten me with an Egyptian gloom like his. For me there is a hope in the world to come, where the weary are at rest."

"But is there no hope for you sooner?" asked Hester. "Is there nothing which would make you glad?"

"Nothing!" he replied. "I have a habit of sorrow now, Hester, and I cannot shake it off. It is a poisoned garment, if you will, but to tear it off would tear my living flesh. No, no! There is no more gladness for me in life."

Could she tell to him her heavy secret ? An unutterable terror seized upon her at the very thought. She remembered the moment when her father, with the glare of madness and suicide in his eyes, had awakened her from the profound sleep of childhood, telling her it was better to die than to live. She recollected the stealthy, murderous blow which had nearly killed Robert Waldron. Her heart failed her. Overhead was that closed room, which had been a constant testimony against Rose ; and now Hester involuntarily held her breath and listened, as if she heard some sound there. John Morley listened also ; but there was nothing to be heard, as there never had been since Rose had fled. He sighed weariedly, and turned over the leaves of the book without reading them. The striking of the house-clock seemed welcome to him ; and he bade Hester good-night, and left her alone in the gloomy room.

Hester waited until she heard him lock his chamber door, and then she fetched Rose to the warmth of the fire still burning in the grate. In the dark room Rose had not realized that she was indeed once more in her husband's

house. But this was his hearth. Here was his chair standing where it had been used to stand in her days of innocence, gone for ever. There was his open book, with the leaves still fluttering as if they felt the movement of his fingers. This was the light he had been reading by, and the air he had breathed. It was her husband's hearth, and she had been a curse to it. She was come back to it in secret, and with trembling. She felt now how impossible it would be to face him, to look into his eyes, and to hear his voice. She glanced about her for some refuge to hide herself in—herself, a scared, abject, frightened wretch, who ought to steal away into some hole to die alone and unseen. Her wild despairing gaze round her husband's room met the sweet, grave, compassionate eyes of Hester.

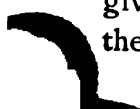
"Sit here, poor mother," she said, drawing nearer the fire her own mother's chair, which in the lost days Rose had always given up for her little step-daughter. She sank down upon it, her lips moving without a sound, and her white face turned towards Hester. Hester had not seen it before. It was the same face as that of the gay young girl she had once been ;

but that face disfigured and marred and aged by shame. The soft lines were hardened, and the brightness had grown dim, and the freshness had become sullied and tarnished. Hester could not bear to look at it ; and as she moved to and fro, ministering to her sore necessities, she did so with averted and downcast eyes.

The hours of the night wore away very slowly. Sometimes Rose fell into a feverish slumber, broken with sobs and starts. She would not go to bed, and Hester did not urge it. What she was to do with her, Hester did not know ; and while she watched her uneasy rest, she tried to shape out some plan for her future life. To seek any home for her in Little Aston would be madness, as every one would know her and the story of her shame. To send her away, whom she had so earnestly and so long sought to find, seemed impossible, ten times impossible, if, as she said, there was no hope of her life. It would be practicable enough to keep her in her father's house, for John Morley's automatic habits could be counted upon to a moment. There were rooms in his house which he had never entered within her memory, and which he would never think

of visiting. The cost of her maintenance there would be less than anywhere else, and money was very scarce with them. But she recoiled from the idea of suffering her to dwell by stealth and unforgiven in her husband's house, to sleep under the same roof. Hester recalled her father's melancholy cry, "She will never sleep under my roof again." Moreover, now she guessed somewhat more clearly the heinousness of Rose's guilt. She could not keep her unknown to her father, in the shelter of his dishonoured home.

From time to time Rose woke up and murmured little scraps of her sad history. She had taken no special care to conceal the traces of her flight, yet it had happened so that she had left Falaise and wandered into a remote country district, where she had lived cheaply, as one can do in France, for some years upon the money which was in her possession. When it was gone she had entered into a situation as lady's-maid, and so returned with the family to England, three years ago. She had always passed as a widow. Her last situation she had given up only two months before ; and since then she had been living in poor and solitary



lodgings in London, with no society but the memory of the past ; which had grown day by day into stronger force, until it had driven her back to Little Aston in the forlorn hope of casting herself upon her husband's forgiveness. Hester shook her head sadly at these last words. There was no chance, whatever, that John Morley would forgive her.

" You do not yet know what you have done," she said, with unconscious severity. " If you could see him you would know better what he has to forgive. He may forgive you before you die. But I dare not tell him that you are here ; I dare not mention your name to him."

" But it is so many years ago !" cried Rose, clasping her thin hands together.

" Many years ago !" echoed Hester ; " no ; it has been every day of those ten years. The grief has been new every morning. Ah ! I understand it better now. Every day he has felt himself deserted and betrayed. Oh, my father ! my poor father !"

She covered her face with her hands as if she could no longer endure the sight of her who had wrought her father's misery. But a slight sound caused her to look up. Rose was

wrapping round her the shabby cloak, still damp and soiled from the rain of the evening. Her wan face was flushed, and her eyes, burning with inward fever, had lost their former distress.

"I am going away," she said, "and I will not come back till I crawl here dying. I must see him again, and hear him say he forgives me; and if he sees me dying at his feet, he will say it. But I will go away for a little while, Hetty."

"But where will you go?" asked Hester.

"Oh, I don't know," she cried, wringing her hands; "why does God let women as wretched and lonely as me live? I could never put an end to myself, for I'm afraid to die. And now I shall go away, and it will come creeping on and on, and I shall know it is there, and there will not be a voice to speak gently to me. Oh, little Hetty, cannot you help me?"

"Yes," answered Hester, taking her bonnet and cloak from her feeble hands; "I will help you. If my father ever heard you had been ill in misery and solitude, it would only add to his pain. You must stay somewhere near to me, poor mother, so that I can nurse you and

comfort you. Think of God rather than of my father. You have separated yourself from him, but you have not separated yourself for ever from God. You belong to Him still."

In tones as soft and soothing as those a mother uses to a suffering child, Hester spoke these words to Rose. She placed the poor forlorn creature in her mother's chair again, and smoothed gently the locks of light hair, now thin and gray, which had fallen in disorder over her face. Rose slumbered again fitfully, crying out in her dreams for her husband's forgiveness. Once or twice Hester started with terror, thinking she heard his step upon the stairs; but the dreary night wore away without surprise. As soon as the late dawn began to glimmer upon the uncurtained window, she awoke Rose and took her up-stairs to her own room, where she would be safe from all eyes.

CHAPTER XV.

THE OLD NURSERY.

It was as Hester drew up the window-blind in her own room, and her eye fell upon the melancholy-looking outbuilding opposite it, that a practicable plan for the shelter of Rose presented itself to her. The old nursery, which at some remote date in the past had perhaps been the scene of childish sports and laughter, would be a refuge well fitted for her safety and concealment. Still she resolved within herself to ask her father's consent, though her habitual independence of action might very well have acquitted her conscience from the necessity of seeking it. She wished to feel that she had his sanction. She thought that at some future season it would prove a consolation to him to know that he had himself given a refuge and shelter to Rose.

At breakfast, with lowered eyelids and a voice which betrayed her intense anxiety, she made her request to John Morley.

"I met a poor woman last night at chapel,"

she said, "a stranger in the town, without friends. She has been a lady's maid for some years, but she is now in great destitution. She thinks of getting her living by needlework, but she can scarcely do more than earn bread by that. I wish we could help her, father."

"It is very little that we can do," he said, mournfully.

"Yes, we can do a great deal," she answered; "what she dreads most is associating with drunken and ignorant poor people. I don't think poverty is so bad in itself; but it is bad when you are compelled to live among low people. I don't mind being poor in the least, while we are together, father."

"What can we do for her then, Hester?" asked John Morley.

"There is the old nursery in the yard," she said, with a feeling of desperate resolve; "it is only filled with rubbish now, but there is a good grate in it, and the roof is whole. If a few panes were put into the window, and I found some old furniture for it, it would be quite a home for the poor creature. We might even ask a small rent for it, if you thought that was best."

"Hester!" ejaculated her father, in a tone of reproach.

"Then I may do it," she answered, eagerly. "Oh, you will never repent it, dear father. You do not know what good may come of it. She will never come into your way, poor thing! You will never see her, I am sure; for she is afraid of being seen. She has been very unhappy in her marriage, and she is afraid of ever meeting her husband again. No; you will never see her."

Hester was speaking to herself rather than to him, in a manner which might well have excited his suspicions. But John Morley saw nothing of her agitation; he was plunged into more personal and more perplexing contemplations.

"Hester," he said, "I am in sore need of money. We must raise near upon £200 before the beginning of next week. I have some heavy bills to meet."

For some years past John Morley's method of conducting his business had been by drawing bills, which always came due long before he had the money to meet them. Hester had been very early initiated into these anxieties.

"How can we do it?" she asked, with some

natural disquietude at the mention of a sum so large.

"There is but one way that I can see," he answered; "we must mortgage the house. Yet it is the only property I could leave to you if I died; and it came to me with your mother. Everything has gone wrong with me since I lost her. I would not do anything with it without your consent, Hester."

"Don't think of me, father," she said, "and don't trouble about me. If that is the only thing we can do, let us do it at once. Who would lend us the money upon the house?"

"I don't know," he replied, with a helpless shake of the head.

"Father," she continued, with a beating heart, "I know who would do it, and it might be kept a secret, so that all the town may not talk about it. Will you let me tell the person I am thinking of?"

"Who is it?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Mr. Waldron," answered Hester.

"Mr. Waldron!" he repeated; "I could not receive any favour from him. It would be like taking money for my—Oh, Hester, life is very hard!"

She understood his half-uttered sentence perfectly ; and her heart ached for him and the broken-spirited, desolate woman hidden away from his sight.

"It would be no favour," she said earnestly ; "we should pay the interest of the money, or he should have the house. You should not see him yourself, but I will in your place. You could write to him, you know, and I will take your letter, and explain everything to him. He would not think he was doing you any favour ; I will take care of that. Then nobody would know except ourselves and him."

"I cannot make out how the business has fallen away so much," sighed John Morley.

Any one seeing his melancholy and abstracted face, and hearing the mournful tones of his voice, would very easily have understood why customers were few and their visits brief in John Morley's shop. No one chooses to do his shopping where he meets with a face and voice adapted to a house of mourning. Hester understood it better than her father, but she could not make it plain to him. She knew, too, that he tacitly agreed to her plan, and she said no more about it. For the rest of the day she

was busy over the more pressing duty of getting Rose's refuge ready before night-fall. When it was over she lit a fire in the grate so long empty and cold. The nursery looked but a poor place after all her care. The walls were discoloured and stained, and the rafters of the sloping roof were black with age. There was a little bed in one corner, with the softest mattress and pillows off Hester's own bedstead. Two chairs stood one on each side of the narrow fire-place, with a small round table between them. It all looked bare, dingy, and forlorn. In the solitude of her long lonely hours the occupant of this room would have time for repentance; but there seemed no place for atonement and reparation. What could she do in this poor refuge and hiding-place? In the dusk of the evening Hester led her step-mother to the only home she could provide for her. Rose stood motionless in the centre of the little room, looking about it with searching and troubled eyes.

"It is the best I can do," said Hester anxiously; "we are very poor."

"Poor!" echoed Rose.

She said no more, and her face grew paler

and more troubled ; but afterwards there rested upon her worn features an expression of solemnity amounting almost to dignity, such as had never been seen upon them in her bright girlish days.

“God bless you, Hetty,” she cried ; “you are better than a daughter to me. This is the place where I am to die, seeing you to the last ; and your father. He cannot be relentless, when you are so good. Oh, my darling, my darling ! you are like an angel from heaven to me.”

She flung herself on her knees, and threw her arms around Hester, with tears of profound anguish, and sobs such as might be wrung from tortured lips.

When Hester quitted the old nursery, Rose waited for some minutes without stirring, in the attitude of one who listens eagerly. Then very cautiously she stole to the door, and opened it a little way to look out into the yard. The house opposite seemed to tower above her very high and very black in the darkness, with one window lighted up in the highest story of the gable to the right, and another on the ground floor of the gable to the left. She knew their

meaning well. Lawson was still at work in his attic, and her husband was sitting in his old place with his books about him. She could remember him so well; the thick brown hair just catching a tinge of silver, and the studious handsome face which had been wont to brighten with a smile as sudden as a flash of lightning when he met her eye—a rare smile, reserved exclusively for her. She wondered to herself whether he had ever smiled so upon his daughter. Since she had seen Hester, she had felt a little more comforted about her husband, and a little less remorseful. He had not been so deserted or so lonely as she had pictured to herself. He had watched his child growing up at his side. There came a pang, an unreasonable pang, amounting almost to jealousy, at the thought that he had grown forgetful of her and her sin in the companionship of Hester. In the brief space of her married life she had fostered a profound jealousy of Hester's mother. And now, as she looked down into the yard towards the lighted window behind which he was sitting, an unconquerable longing seized her to steal down the crazy staircase, and in amongst the blackened stems of the lilacs and

the dwarfed laburnums, to look once more upon her husband, whose love she had bartered for the boyish passion of Robert Waldron.

She listened again, but there was no movement, no sign of life in the yard below. On the other side of the house lay the street and the town and the busy world of which she had taken her last farewell. For to venture out into these streets and to show her familiar face among the townspeople would be to banish herself for ever from the home where she had come to die. Was she positively come to die here? Was she never more to sleep on any other bed but this until she fell into the last awful unbroken sleep? Were these walls and this narrow court the only spot of the wide world on which her eyes were ever to look again? She stretched out her arms, and raised her bent figure to its fullest height. She felt no pain, nothing but the feebleness, often worse than pain, which is the result of long mental suffering. The London physician had perhaps been deceived by her symptoms, which, possibly, she had exaggerated to him. She might live many years yet. But to live—what was that? To die was dreadful; but she could not choose

to live. She tried to send back her thoughts to the time when she fancied she had loved another better than her husband ; but it was in vain. The thought of John Morley was there quick and poignant in her inmost soul ; but Robert Waldron was forgotten. She must see her husband.

Still she lingered and listened, watching the gleam through the uncurtained window, and the black naked boughs of the trees standing out clearly against its feeble light. She turned back and looked at her own faded face in a small glass which hung against the wall, over a little toilet-table. If her husband could only see it, and read in it the story of her bitter repentance, would he not forgive her ? But how much would his forgiveness mean ? Was it possible that he could be reconciled to her ? That he could receive her again ? Call her his wife, and restore her to her forfeited place ? No, no ; that could never be. He might look upon her again, and pardon her if she were in the hour of death. But if life were strong within her, and many years lay before her, would he not spurn her from him, and refuse to lay his finger to her burden of shame ?

At length she hurried down the steps and into the dreary little garden. She crept stealthily towards the window, lest she should enter into the revealing light, and her husband should lift up his eyes and see her standing without in the chill of the wintry night. Her face, wan, faded, and withered, approached cautiously the uncurtained panes. The room—she had seen that last night, with its ten years of added dinginess and decay; but who was this aged man, with a head bowed and white with years, who was bending over her husband's desk, and turning, from time to time, anxiously to the great account-books she had hated years ago? Her husband could not yet be fifty years old, a man in the full vigour and strength of life. The lamp beside him was covered with a shade which cast a gloom over the rest of the room, while it threw a full light upon him. The thin, shrivelled hands, the rounded shoulders, the grey and hollow features, the white hair—Rose saw them as in a dream. He got up at last, pushing away his books, and took his stand upon the hearth, with his back to the fire, and his full face turned towards her. She drew back with a creeping thrill of terror.

"Hester," she heard him say, "I have finished my letter to Mr. Waldron. But if it were not for your sake, I would sooner let things take their course than ask him to lend me money. Ay, I would sooner die!"

Rose waited to hear no more. She cast one terrified glance at her husband, and then she fled back in a panic of fear to her hiding-place.


"Oh, what have I done?" she cried, in a frightened whisper, speaking as if some one was near enough to hear her. "He was a good man, and a prosperous man! I did not know what I should do. God forgive me! He never will; but God, in His great mercy, forgive me!"

She counted no more upon her husband's forgiveness. What there was in his face she did not know, but it had cast out all hope from her heart. For the first time, looking into the deep gulf of her husband's wrongs, she knew that it must be for ever fixed between her and him. Perhaps in the last hour he might lay his hand in hers, and let her feel its warm forgiving clasp, as she went down into the dark valley of separation; but only in that supreme moment of death. Life, if she lived, must be a perpetual banishment from his presence.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LESSON FOR HESTER.

THE next morning, Hester, with her father's letter in her hand, wended her way slowly across the park to Aston Court. She felt a natural reluctance to the merest chance of meeting Robert Waldron, towards whom her feelings had undergone a great revulsion. Until now he had claimed from her an undefined and rather pleasant pity, mingled with admiration. If Carl had not come into her narrow world, her sentiment for Robert would have bordered upon a girl's first love for a seeming hero ; and her heart, free and tender, might have centred in him its interests, and possibly its affections. But with Rose at home, with this dark sad shadow at her side, she recoiled from the idea of seeing him again for the first time. To her infinite relief she just caught a glimpse of him leaving the park on horseback by another route. Mr. Waldron then would be alone, and she could ask him not to let his son know of the transaction. She



quicken her steps, and took the nearest way to the room where he was generally to be found in the morning. It led past the window of the breakfast-room, where Hester saw a vision of Miss Waldron sitting near the fire, and Carl in close conversation with her. She nodded to Carl, whose face was turned towards the window, and hurried on. Mr. Waldron was at that moment walking along the farthest end of the terrace, and Hester started to run after him. The colour which this exercise brought to her pale cheeks gave her the beauty she lacked; and as Mr. Waldron turned sharply round, he acknowledged to himself that Robert's love had sufficient excuse. To Hester's extreme astonishment, he drew her into his arms, and imprinted a solemn kiss upon her glowing face. She had not the faintest idea that he was saluting her for the first time as the daughter of whom he had fondly dreamed these last two years.

"My dear," he said, drawing her hand upon his arm, and covering it with his own, "I was just thinking of you. You are often in my thoughts, Hester,—how often you would be surprised to know."

No opening could be more propitious. In a few incoherent sentences Hester stammered out the purpose of her visit, as she walked down the terrace, leaning upon his arm. He opened the folding doors of his room, and led her into it, seating her in a chair close to his own, and regarding with delight her downcast face, and her long eyelashes now beaded with tears. Nothing could have pleased him more; no overture could have come more opportunely. At the very moment when he was planning some mode of approach to John Morley, he had himself sent Hester to ask his help.

"Hester," he said, "your father has given me the greatest pleasure I have known for a long while. I am right glad he did not go to anybody else. What! are we not brothers? Have we not been members of the same church these thirty years? He has acted like a Christian in coming to me. I will return at once with you to your home. This is the right thing. I find great pleasure in this."

He rubbed his hands heartily, looking down upon Hester with a smile of appropriation. Already he was thinking of what house would be near enough to Aston Court, where he could

bask a little in the freedom and gentleness of her presence whenever he grew slightly weary, as he did sometimes, of his daughter's piety.

"I was very much afraid of coming," said Hester, with a sigh of relief, and raising her eyes to his with a smile that enchanted him. His daughter-in-law promised fair to become his idol.

"Afraid of me!" he repeated, his austere face beaming with pleasure; "whatever could make the poor child afraid of me? Am I so very terrible to you, Hester?"

"Oh, no!" she said; "but you are the greatest man I ever have to speak to; and I don't know anybody else who would have been bold enough to come to you as I have."

"Bold!" cried Mr. Waldron; "she calls herself bold! And asks simply for two hundred pounds! I wish it was two thousand, and you should have it at once. Come, let us go to your father, and set this business to rights. But as for a mortgage on his house, that is all nonsense."

"We must not go to him," said Hester, earnestly; "and he will never consent to take any money from you except upon a mortgage,

for which he will pay interest. I know my father, and he will not listen to any other proposal. He would put his affairs into some lawyer's hands immediately."

"But what then does he want me to do?" asked Mr. Waldron, disappointed.

"He has written to you," she answered, "and given a fair statement of his debts. What I want is to ask you to advance any sum of money you think will bring us through our difficulties; though I am sure I don't see how they can end."

She spoke very dejectedly, and Mr. Waldron longed to tell her what a brilliant lot lay at her feet for her acceptance. But he dared not do it yet. He opened John Morley's letter, and read it carefully, seeing from it far more clearly than the writer how complicated his embarrassments were. He determined to avail himself of this new confidence established between him and Hester, in order to advance the happiness of his son.

"I must deliberate over this," he said, "and I shall want you to come up again several times, I dare say. You may take the money home with you at once; but still there will be papers to draw up, and I should like to know more

about your affairs, as far as your father chooses to confide them to me. You will not dislike coming several times?"

"Oh, I shall like it," she said, frankly; "I would spare my father any trouble that I could bear for him."

There was a fond and truthful devotion in Hester's manner which penetrated to Mr. Waldron's heart; and a treacherous doubt crossed it as to whether his daughter was really as devoted to him.

"And you are very poor, Hester?" he said.

"Very poor," she answered, gravely.

"You would like to be rich?" he asked.

"Dearly," she answered; "I should like to be as rich as you are, Mr. Waldron. I like a house as large and grand as this, and I think I could spend my money like any lady in the land."

"Like any other lady," he corrected.

"No," she said, "I am no lady. I belong quite to the working-classes."

If she belonged to the working-classes, Mr. Waldron wished that all the other ladies of his acquaintance, including his daughter, did the same. When the interview came to an end, he

insisted upon taking her to see Miss Waldron, and himself conducted her to the breakfast-room, where she still was, though she was alone, Carl having taken his departure. Hester was not sorry to see Miss Waldron, as a new interest centred in her, now that she had to regard her as Carl's possible future wife. She was received with a distant condescension intended to keep her in her place, which Miss Waldron was afraid of her forgetting, since she had been invited to dinner at Aston Court. More than this, there was rankling in her mind a suspicion almost amounting to conviction about Robert's meetings with her in Madame Lawson's garret, in spite of that old lady's denials. Her father also seemed disposed to make too much of John Morley's daughter. It was one of the greatest disadvantages of their denomination that social distinctions were apt to be overlooked among the members of a church. Both Mr. Waldron and Hester seemed to ignore them; and it was high time to set her down a little. At the bottom of all lay a terrible doubt of Carl, who did not go on exactly as she wished, and who had never once set her heart beating by calling her Sophia.

"I am very much occupied with a bazaar," she said, after a freezing salutation; "and I have no doubt you can assist me in the plainer work. I will give you some to take home with you."

"I am afraid I shall have no time," she answered; "though, indeed, I thought of asking you if you could not find me some sewing to do at home. I mean for payment. I shall want a little money soon, and I cannot ask my father for any."

Her thoughts were running on the fresh burden she had added to the charge of their household expenditure. Rose would have all her time unoccupied; and Hester knew well how pacifying it is to a woman's spirit to have woman's work in her fingers. Besides, so far as her strength would permit, it would be only right for Rose to do something towards earning her own living. Hester had grown up in the practical school of poverty; so she asked Miss Waldron for work, and the payment for it, quite naturally, and with no overweening sentimental emotion.

"I intend to ask Mrs. Grant as well," she continued; "but I am afraid she will not have

much to give me, as she has all her wedding clothes still unworn. But perhaps she will know of somebody else. I shall want a constant supply," she added reflectively, "and it will be beautifully done."

To Miss Waldron an acknowledgment and request like these were a confession of immeasurable inferiority. She almost wondered to see Hester comfortably seated in her presence; and she cast a cold supercilious eye upon her dress which was plain and worn, but, in some manner, in perfect keeping with the sweet face of the wearer. She answered in a tone of stiff patronage, which marked the vast distance between them.

"I will see what I can do to assist you, Hester Morley," she said; "I have no doubt this is sent for your good, to humble you and prove you. I trust you are profiting by this discipline."

"I hope I am," she replied, simply. "I should be very miserable indeed if I did not believe that God sent all my troubles to do me good in the end. As to being poor, I dare not murmur at that, for Christ was poorer than I am."

Miss Waldron held her peace for a moment, and felt disquieted. If poverty were no inferiority, what advantage had she over Hester?

"You are only a child yet," she said, after a brief pause; "you are but a babe in spiritual things, and must still be fed with milk."

"Do you consider poverty milk for babes?" asked Hester, with a smile.

"I cannot jest upon solemn subjects," answered Miss Waldron, sternly; "but I will see what I can do to assist you, and I will send you a parcel by one of the servants to-morrow. You must excuse me now, for I am very busily engaged."

Thus dismissed, Hester took her leave. Miss Waldron felt happier and more reassured. She had not quite known the extent of John Morley's poverty; but now it had assumed a magnitude sufficient to form an insurmountable barrier between Carl and Hester. Very few young pastors, without private means, could afford the luxury of a portionless wife. But it was quite necessary to make Hester feel her position, for there had been a freedom in her manner which, more than ever, grated upon Miss Waldron's dignity now. She retired to

her dressing-room, and ordered her maid to bring out the summer dresses which she had cast off, with sundry other articles no longer suitable for her own wear. The selection she made was not such as to excite the silent resentment and envy of her attendant. They would convey, she thought, a valuable lesson to Hester. To do her justice, she was not in the least aware of the full measure of her impertinence; for, to her, Hester was still only a young girl, and the daughter of one of their tradespeople who had solicited her for work. But she was quite willing to humble her and bring down her pride. Having completed her selection, she ordered her maid to make them up into a parcel and to convey them to Miss Morley the next time the carriage drove into Little Aston.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MUNIFICENT GIFT.

UNFORTUNATELY for Miss Waldron, it happened that when the Aston Court coachman handed her parcel out to Hester's little servant, who carried it upstairs to her small sitting-room, Annie Grant was there, eagerly discussing with Hester how she could find some suitable work for her. They opened Miss Waldron's packet at once, and regarded its contents with astonished and incredulous eyes. Instead of the sewing they expected, they found, first, an old brown terry-velvet bonnet, of a fashion which had prevailed several years before ; below that a soiled and tumbled dress of some thin material, and a white muslin pelerine which had been a good deal mended. In addition to this munificent gift there were several scraps of ribbons, some very large old collars, an odd flower or two, and a pair of black silk mittens. A note accompanied them, expressing Miss Waldron's hope that Hester Morley would find these articles of clothing useful to her.

Annie Grant possessed sufficient penetration, and had seen enough of Miss Waldron, not to accord to her quite as unhesitating an admiration as the general public of Little Aston. She was of a quick, fiery disposition, and not at all disposed to submit tamely, either for herself or others, to the insolence or assumption of any one. When she saw the tears start to Hester's eyes, and her lips tremble with words she would not speak, her own indignation broke out.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "I never saw or heard or dreamed of such a thing in my whole life! What does the woman mean? How dare she do such a thing? Hester, what is the meaning of it?"

"I asked her for some sewing," said Hester, her lips quivering still, "and she has sent me this."

"Oh!" cried Annie, "I only wish she had brought them herself. I wonder how she could venture to do such a thing! But she counted upon you never telling anybody else; upon no one hearing of it."

"I never should," said Hester.

"I am glad I was here," continued Annie; "very glad! I only wish her father and

brother knew ! Marry Carl, indeed ! No, not if she had ten times her money : the mean, insolent, purse-proud creature ! Hester, you shall give them to me. It would only aggravate you to keep them in your own sight. Let your girl carry them up to our house at once."

"Don't you think we had better keep it a secret ?" asked Hester.


"Keep it a secret !" responded Annie ; "I could not keep it. James will know, and Carl. I should like him to hear what his grand friend has done. I shall take them away with me ; they don't belong to you, for I suppose you won't keep them as a gift. Just look at them, Hester."

She turned over the things strewed upon the table, with gestures and exclamations of indignant excitement. The insult rankled in her mind the more for the outward composure of Hester's manner. She wished to hear her speak with some of her own vehement resentment ; but she was quiet, wounded to the quick, perhaps, but so silent that Annie could not rouse her to utter any words of reproach.

Very shortly Annie went home, followed by the servant bearing Miss Waldron's parcel.

She was burning for some opportunity of making manifest her anger to the author of it, and she possessed too little worldly prudence to conceal it upon any ground of expediency. Carl was not at home, nor her husband. She carried the parcel into her own room, and contemplated the contents afresh. An excellent thought struck her, and she immediately resolved to put it into execution.

Without a moment's pause for consideration, Annie arrayed herself in the cast-off finery which Miss Waldron had selected for conveying a useful lesson to Hester. She put on the shabby and crumpled dress, too short for her, and in consequence, much too short for Hester, who was taller than either of them. Over that she threw the yellow and darned muslin tippet, with one of the largest collars, which reached to the tip of her shoulders ; and she fastened to it the scraps of old ribbon and the odd flowers. Upon her head she placed the long poked bonnet, which almost concealed her face ; and then she drew upon her hands the lace mittens. A more singular apparition than her own reflection in her glass had never met her eyes, and she burst into an uncontrollable fit of



laughter at the sight of it. The distance between their own house and the park-gates was but short, and she was about to make a call upon Miss Waldron. If either Mr. Waldron or Robert should happen to be present, she would say nothing, and leave Miss Waldron to explain as she could the remarkable figure she presented; but if she should be alone—why then—

Annie sped along quickly towards Aston Court, escaping all observation till she came to the park-gates. Once within them she considered herself safe, and she could walk more quietly. What should she say to Miss Waldron if she found her alone? Annie did not feel as if she should be at any loss for words; but then what would be the end of it? Very likely Miss Waldron for her own sake would keep the secret, but there could never be any cordiality or friendliness between them again. Not that she shrank from this mode of revenge in the least. She could not help laughing out aloud as she imagined Miss Waldron's consternation and chagrin upon recognising her valuable gift to Hester coming up to view again in so unexpected a manner. Would it not be best to say nothing at all, and leave her

dress silently to rebuke and confound the impertinence of the giver? It was possible that it would be the most effectual and the most pardonable mode of reproof.

Her mind was busily discussing the subject, when she saw, not very far off, her husband and Robert Waldron coming to meet her. There was neither time nor a way for retreat. Grant catching sight of a singular person coming towards him with a figure and carriage like his wife, arrested his progress for a moment, with an exclamation of doubt and surprise. Robert Waldron, whose sight was longer and keener than his, recognised Annie perfectly.


"It is Mrs. Grant," he said, quickening his steps.

"But what is the matter with her?" asked Grant. "She does not look like herself."

She was so unlike herself, that, as she came nearer, Robert could scarcely restrain the ejaculation of surprise which rose to his lips. Grant did not attempt to restrain his.

"Annie!" he exclaimed, "is it really you? Where are you going to? What in the world has happened to you?"

"I am going to call upon Miss Waldron,"



she answered, with an hysterical laugh. For an instant a wild doubt crossed her husband's mind as to whether she had not lost possession of her reason, and he looked steadily into her excited face.

"Annie," he said, "what is the matter?"

This simple question was put by him so gravely, that Annie was more and more hysterically affected. He drew her arm into his own, and led the way towards the lodge.

"We had better go in," he said to Robert; "we can get water for her there, and the lodge-keeper will leave us her room for a few minutes."

Before long, Annie had recovered her composure, and sat, feeling very much subdued, on the settle in the lodge, while her husband and Robert Waldron waited for her complete recovery. She was crying now, but a word might send her off into laughter again; and she wiped away her tears, and drank little sips of water from the glass her husband held to her lips. Robert could not determine to go while the mystery of her conduct remained unsolved; for his eye recognised some of the shabby finery she wore as having once belonged to his

sister, and he felt that he must learn the meaning of it.

"I was going to see Miss Waldron," repeated Annie at last, as soon as she could command her voice.

"But in these rags!" said Grant. "My dear Annie, do control yourself, and satisfy me that you are in a sound mind."

Annie hesitated, and looked towards Robert, but he would not go away.

"These rags," he said, adopting Grant's word, "once belonged to my sister, I am sure; and there is some mystery belonging to them. Dear Mrs. Grant, I beg of you to let me hear the explanation."

"You will never believe me," cried Annie, all her indignation reviving; "but she positively sent these old things this morning as a gift to—guess who to?"

"Not to you," said Grant, with an unpleasant smile.

"No, not me, but to Hester Morley," she answered.

"Hester Morley!" echoed Grant, while Robert's face grew dark as he waited for Annie's answer.

"I was there when they came," she said, "with a note from Miss Waldron, hoping Hester could make use of them. Just look at them. Look at this bonnet."

She took it off her head and held it at arm's length, laughing and catching her breath in sobs at the same moment. Robert snatched it from her, and crushed it out of all shape under his foot.

"Hester!" he said; "good heavens! I can scarcely believe what you say. Why, Hester is to be my wife, if I can win her by any means; and you tell me these things were sent to her by my sister!"

"Your wife!" exclaimed Annie.

"Yes," he answered, curbing a little his passion; "I have loved Hester ever since Grant here carried me into John Morley's house; or, at any rate, ever since I first saw her there. Does it surprise you? It ought not. My father feels no surprise."

"Does *he* know?" asked Grant, in a voice of concern.

"Yes, and consents to it,—is anxious for it," said Robert. "Why! what is there strange about it? You know her, both of you; what

is there to surprise you in the fact that I love her?"

"Oh, nothing!" they both answered in one breath; and then all three were silent, none of them looking at the others. Annie was quite calm now, and ready to submit to any of her husband's directions. He said, gravely, she must give up her intended visit to Miss Waldron, and that she could wait where she was, while he fetched her one of her own hats and cloaks.

Robert stayed behind with her, but Annie did not enter into conversation with him; and he felt embarrassed by her silence. Very few words passed between them before Grant's return, but he shook hands heartily with her before she left.

"I like you, and I thank you very much for what you had intended to do," he said, and he turned his steps homewards; while Grant accompanied Annie back safely to her own house.

Carl listened in silence to the story of Annie's escapade, but it touched and made to vibrate painfully many chords in his nature. His friend Miss Waldron had been gradually

losing some of the brightness of the halo with which she had crowned herself; but this impertinence towards Hester appeared to show him the shallowness of her heart. Those who demand little homage for themselves, require the whole world to acknowledge the superiority of those they love. He was too deeply wounded by her conduct to speak of it, even to his sister, but he could ask a question about Hester.

"Are they so very poor, then?" he said.

"So poor," answered Annie, "that she asked Miss Waldron and me if we could give her any work to do."

"Yet Hester has just taken in a poor woman," observed Grant, "and fitted up a little out-building at the back of the house for her. She asked me to go to see her yesterday. A poor creature. I found her almost frightened to death by some London fellow, who told her her lungs were almost gone. I don't believe it. I dare say it is she who wants the sewing, for she must live."

"But why should not Hester tell us so?" asked Annie.

"There is some mystery about it," he replied;

"the woman has evidently been an educated woman. I asked her age particularly, and she said she was thirty-four. She seemed oppressed by a peculiar kind of fear which I could not account for. I have my suspicions."

"What are they?" asked Carl, looking up eagerly.

Grant leaned over the table towards him, and lowered his voice to a whisper which would have been inaudible to the keenest ear outside the room.

"That this woman is no other than John Morley's lost wife," he said. "Mark you, it is no more than a suspicion, and it must be sacred with us. But if it be so—"

"Then God bless and help Hester!" cried Carl, rising suddenly, and making his escape to his study.

The conjecture just thrown out by Grant, which had struck his mind with the force of truth, moved Carl's heart to its depths. The thought of Hester very poor, and asking for work from Miss Waldron and Annie, had been enough in itself to awaken the most chivalrous sympathies of his nature; but if Grant's suspicions were true, what a story hung upon it!

He pictured to himself John Morley, lost and buried in gloom, with his dreary house peopled by memories which were half a shame and half a sorrow; and this pale, lost shadow, haunting, unknown to him, the home of her happier days, but separated from him, not by walls merely, but by an impassable abyss which she dared not attempt to cross. And going from one to the other was Hester, speaking with the same tone, and looking with the same tenderness upon each of them. If he had but the right to share her secret! If he could only strengthen and uphold her when her spirit failed her along the straight and difficult path!

Underneath all these thoughts which stirred him there was a disguised and subtle under-current of emotion. If Hester had found and received to a shelter near herself, the lost Rose, would it be possible for her ever to become Robert Waldron's wife?

CHAPTER XVIII.

BLOW AFTER BLOW.

MISS WALDRON heard no more of her gift to Hester. By one common consent, arrived at by different processes, all those who had become acquainted with the circumstance permitted it to drop into apparent oblivion. Hester knew nothing of Annie's plan of revenge which had been prematurely nipped; and as she never mentioned Miss Waldron's present again, Annie did not care to speak of it. She could not but acknowledge that her husband and Carl were right when they said that the whole thing must be suffered to pass, and that it would be dangerous to make an enemy of Miss Waldron. But she was glad Robert knew, exceedingly glad. She had no doubt it would come out some day or other from his lips, and cover his sister with confusion. In the meantime it was very difficult to maintain a pleasant and cordial demeanour towards her, when she came to see her and Carl so often.

This action of Miss Waldron had thrown

difficulties into the paths of all. To Hester it made it a far from easy task to go to Aston Court, as she felt herself compelled to, in order to finish the business arrangements with Mr. Waldron, who had insisted upon advancing a sum of £500 instead of £200, which would set John Morley clear from his liabilities for about twelve months to come. Robert, on his part, found it so hard to keep this secret, and restrain his wrath, that he was not sorry when some pressing business demanded his presence in London; though it prevented him seeing Hester upon her rare visits to his father.

But for Carl the difficulty was tenfold. He had now been pastor of the church at Little Aston for more than six months; and Miss Waldron began to be impatient at the slowness of his comprehension with respect to the marks of preference she showered upon him. She had become at last aware of a growing coldness in Annie Grant's manner, which was at once unaccountable and unpardonable, seeing that both Grant and Carl were under the patronage of her family. She could not brook any caprices in her inferiors; but it was necessary to

If you could see her now, would you dare to ask me to be your wife ? ”

To Hester the image of Rose was very present ; but to Robert it was a memory of so many years past, and so unwelcome an intruder, that he could not summon it readily to his mind. As he had told Hester, he felt assured that she was dead, for such lost ones seldom live without giving some sign of their existence. But there was something in Hester's tone and face which made his heart die within him. It was not that she was indignant or impassioned. There was rather a tranquil yet intense pity for him, which placed her at an immeasurable height above him.

“ O Hetty,” he cried, “ little Hetty, is it quite impossible for me to win your love ? ”

“ Why do you ask me ? ” she said, in a troubled voice. “ It is impossible ; you must know it to be impossible. Oh, why did you ever think of such a thing ? How could you ever think of it ? ”

They stood for a minute or two in silence, her calm, compassionate eyes shining upon him from across the great gulf between him and her. “ Besides all this,” said a voice in his inmost

soul, "between us and you, there is a great gulf fixed : so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence."

"Hester," he cried again, "have pity upon me. This is my punishment indeed."

"I am very sorry for you," answered her pitiful voice; "but you ought to have felt at first that it would be impossible. My father would rather go down, down to the very depths of poverty than see me here. Good-bye. I can never come again."

He had thrown himself upon a chair, and hidden his face from the steady reproachful compassion of her look; and she lingered for a minute looking sorrowfully at him, and around the room she should enter no more. This life of wealth and ease would have been very pleasant; even the brief snatches she had seen of it had been an enjoyment to her. She was growing a little weary of the long daily struggle, and the sordid cares of poverty. If things had been different, what a glory it would have been to John Morley to see his daughter the mistress of Aston Court! But it was impossible now.

Robert Waldron heard her murmur good-bye once more, but he did not raise his head. She lingered still, as if searching for some word to comfort him, but there was none which her lips could utter. He listened to her footfall across the floor to the glass-doors opening upon the terrace, but he could not believe that she was going to leave him. He raised his head in time to catch a last glance of her pitying face, and her gesture of farewell; and then Hester was lost to him. He did not think of following her. Eleven years ago, he had bartered for the pleasures of sin for a season, the happiness he craved in vain to-day.

CHAPTER XX.

A PASTORAL VISIT.

IT is impossible to describe the disappointment of Mr. Waldron, when, after an hour's absence, he returned to the house, and found Robert alone and Hester gone. Robert told him of his rejection with a suppressed mournfulness which troubled his father's heart more than the most vehement expressions of grief. Mr. Waldron felt a little mortified that Hester's conscience should be more sensitive than his own. If he, a deacon of the church, had considered his son's early error atoned for, and consigned to oblivion, why should this young girl set up her childish judgment against his? Yet in his heart of hearts he knew that she was right. Robert, even in the first shock and agony of his disappointment, acknowledged the same. It was in truth a greater shock to him than it ought to have been; for in spite of all his doubts and hesitations, there had really been a well-grounded assurance in his mind that Hester

would not reject him, with all his advantages ; but she had now done it in such a manner as to pluck up every root of hope. She had said it was impossible with such utter decision, blended with an inexpressible pity,—a pity which he felt keenly could never grow into love,—that he knew he must never again approach her, or address himself to her, upon this subject. He loved her more passionately than before, but a dull despair had joined itself to his passion. Those pangs of punishment without which, she had said, he could not repent, had already come upon him.

This state of mind, a novel one to Robert Waldron, might have proved salutary, but for the intervention of his sister, who, while rejoicing that Hester had declined the honour offered to her, could not forgive her for its rejection. When Mr. Waldron announced to her that Hester had positively refused her brother, she could not refrain her tongue from a spiteful little speech, uttered in Robert's hearing.

“Don't talk to me about Hester Morley's scruples,” she said ; “I know her too well. It is because we have chosen a handsome boy

for our pastor that she has said No to Robert."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Waldron, whose chagrin was only second to his son's.

"I mean," she answered, "that Carl Bramwell is in love with her, and she with him. I have suspected it for some time; and he confessed it to me only the other evening. If we had invited David Scott to the church at Little Aston, Hester Morley would have been only too proud to accept Robert."

Neither Mr. Waldron nor Robert felt quite sure of this; yet the poisoned shaft entered into their hearts. Mr. Waldron's thoughts turned with regret to the day when among the seventy students at the college he had selected this polished and scholarly young man to become the successful rival of his son. He could not help being fond of Carl, and he had had in the beginning, a scheme for furthering a love-match between him and his favourite, Hester. But that was before he had ever thought of her as his own possible future daughter, and now he could only be sorry that he had chosen him for the pastor of their little church.

As for Hester, she retraced her steps homewards, after her interview with Robert, in a strange mood of bewilderment and conflicting feelings. The fine old park, fresh clothed in the beauty of spring, lay around her ; and she could scarcely realize the fact that she had just refused to become mistress of it, and of the great mansion belonging to it, which was the grandest place she had ever seen. The larch-trees were fringed and tasselled with green leaflets, with a crimson cone here and there amongst them ; and the noble, smooth-limbed beeches were white with their satin leaf-buds. The scent of violets hidden about the roots of the trees, and of cowslips nodding among the grass, was wafted past her upon the soft breeze. High over head rose the sky, higher and serener than in winter, and a few cool gray clouds floated across it. How different was all this to the close street, and the gloomy walls, and the dusky windows of her home ! Hester sighed heavily, and there was a multitude of regrets in her sigh. Alas ! for the time that had gone by, and the ineffaceable sin which had been stamped upon it for ever !


She knew by the deep trouble of her own heart, that she could have loved Robert Waldron; and for the sake of the love which might have been, a fine, sweet sense of tenderness softened her spirit towards him. The days came back to her vividly when she had loved him with the full-hearted ardour of a child; and if he had only remained good and true, so would she have loved him now. She began to see the nature of his punishment; and to feel something of its weight. She wished passionately that he had never seen her—but there, again, his own disobedience had wrought out its own consequences. If he had been true to his word, it was possible that he might never have met with her; it was certain that there would not have been the familiarity between them which had been brought about by their frequent meetings at Madame Lawson's. He must have been in love with her all that time, thought Hester; and her face crimsoned at the thought.

She had no one to tell of what had befallen her that morning,—of the vision which had opened suddenly to her, but from which she had turned steadfastly away. It would be

impossible to speak of it to her father, and still more so to Rose. She had not seen much of Annie lately, and this was not a secret to tell to a woman whose husband and brother shared every thought. So she was obliged to hide it away during the daytime, while she went about her work ; and at night she pondered over it unhealthily, contrasting what was with what might have been.

It was impossible for Carl not to see upon Hester's face a deeper shadow than that which had rested upon it for some time before the evening, now several weeks ago, which they had spent together at Aston Court. He had not been so often at John Morley's house of late ; but Grant told him that something was amiss with Hester, and that if she did not rally quickly, she would have to leave home, which she had never left before, for change of air. He had said the same to Hester herself, and given her a great dread. For how could she leave home now above all other times, when Rose was a pensioner upon her ?

Carl argued with himself that it was his duty as a pastor to visit Hester, and he would do so as a pastor merely. He was a little



petulant when Annie inquired where he was going, and how long he would be. His mind was so intently fixed upon the duty he was about to perform, that he knew nothing of what was passing around him, until he found himself in Hester's little sitting-room upstairs. It was the second time only, that he had been permitted to penetrate to this room. He was excited by it, why, he could scarcely tell. All here belonged to Hester; the books, the little desk, the work-basket,—no hand but hers touched them. He caught a momentary glimpse of a mysterious shadow flitting past the dim casement in the old nursery opposite the window. It was not Hester's figure but that of the strange unknown woman, of whom Grant had whispered his suspicion. Would Hester speak of her to him? for he was come as her pastor, her guide, and adviser, with more influence and authority than an ordinary friend.

Asking himself very anxiously this question, for in the answer to it lay the possibility of a very close intimacy between them, he turned round upon hearing the lifting of the latch, and met Hester face to face. They spoke to one

love you, Annie, and Grant, and I. Why are you so cast down and disquieted? Is it anything you can tell to me? I might be able to help you. Is there nothing I can do for you?"

"Oh, I have been very miserable!" said Hester, with a sharp accent of pain in her voice.

"There will come a change," answered Carl; "though heaviness may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning."

"The morning is very long in coming," she said, sighing mournfully.

"It may seem so," he continued, "it may even be so, but it is coming surely and steadily. You are weary now, till your heart faints within you, but it will not be for ever. Cannot you tell me your new trouble?"

"Yes," answered Hester, acting upon a sudden impulse to confide in him, though she had resolved to bear her burden alone. It was growing too heavy for her now, and her spirit was beginning to fail. "Yes, I will tell you, and you can help me. Do you see the door and window opposite? There is a little room there, and some weeks ago my father gave me his permission to let a poor woman come and

live in it. She is very poor and very ill. Mr. Grant has seen her."

"He told me so," said Carl.

"He believed she was not likely to recover at first," continued Hester, "but she is getting better now; not so strong that she can ever go away, and yet not so ill that she is near death. What am I to do? She has no friend in the world except me; not a creature to care for her, or help her. But we are so poor, and I am afraid sometimes that we shall be obliged to leave this house altogether; then what is to become of her?"

"You are meeting trouble half-way now," he answered cheerfully.

Hester drew closer to him, with a frightened face, and whispered her next few sentences.

"Hush! It is Rose Morley, my father's wife. You have heard of her? My father never sees her; she runs no risk of him seeing her. If I had not known she would be safe I never dare have taken her in. She was utterly homeless and friendless, and I brought her here to die, as we both thought. You know my father nearly killed Robert Waldron at our own door? But now we know she may perhaps live years and

years : think what that means. Did I do right to take her in? Ought I to have turned her away into the world ill, even dying as we thought? Do you think my father will not be glad at the last, when he comes to know?"

"God bless you, Hester," cried Carl, laying his hand upon hers, which still rested upon the table, as if she needed that support to keep her from trembling too greatly.

"You don't know what it is like to go from my father's presence to hers," resumed Hester. "Sometimes I wonder why God lets such things come to pass, and I have hard thoughts of Him. That is the worst of all. Don't be shocked with me, but after all, Rose does not seem so very wicked, nor Robert Waldron. She is very penitent: really, truly penitent, and bears her punishment well; but she is solitary and very sorrowful. Will you sometimes come to see her? You can come as a minister without any one being surprised; but you must not be too harsh to her. Will you help me by doing this for her?"

"Help you!" said Carl; "I would give my life for you."

He scarcely knew what he was saying, and

she did not seem to notice it. Once more he saw the pale face behind the dim casement opposite. Hester also saw it, and the tears stood in her eyes.

"No one knows it but me, and now you," she said. "It has been too heavy a burden for me to bear alone. I am not very old yet, but I feel old, older than almost any one I know; a great deal older than Lawson's mother. I suppose it is the anxiety; and now I have more than ever. Mr. Grant said I must leave home; but how can I ever leave home? There was my father first, and now there is Rose as well. You must come and see her for yourself."

"We will go at once," he answered; yet he lingered, and looked into her face with the colour mounting upon his own, and an expression of utter anxiety coming across it. He had a word or two to say, which, left unspoken, would make this interview, sought by him, altogether unsatisfactory and incomplete. He hesitated and stammered, then reproached his coward courage, and spoke hastily.

"I am your pastor, your soul is committed to me. You said just now that Robert Waldron did not seem wicked,—that was your own word

—not wicked in your eyes. Do you know that he loves you ?


“ Yes,” she replied, the crimson flush mantling her cheeks as well as his, “ he told me so ; but Rose is living near me. What could I say to him ? I could never, never become his wife.”

“ Thank God !” cried Carl.

CHAPTER XXI.

ANOTHER PASTORAL VISIT.

CARL followed Hester down stairs, and across the court, which seemed dark to him, for the glass in the window of the old nursery was scarcely transparent, and shed but little light on the outside staircase leading up to it. Hester opened the door quietly, and Carl had time to see Rose before she was aware of their entrance. She was leaning languidly back in a cushioned and padded chair by the fire, the light of which fell upon her worn and colourless face, and the thin fair hair pushed back carelessly from it. Her eyes were shut, and the whole aspect of the wan woman was one of complete dejection and of banishment from every gladness in life. At the sound of voices she sprang up with a glance of terror which showed how she lived in hourly dread of discovery. There was something inexpressibly forlorn in the peculiarity of her circumstances, which touched Carl's heart to the core. He clasped her emaciated hand in his own, and



pressed it with a warmth and heartiness which he had not ventured to bestow upon Hester's.

"Do you know who I am?" asked Rose, looking him searchingly in the face with her dim blue eyes.

"Hester has trusted me with all your history," he answered. "I am come to see you, and I shall come often, to make your life here less solitary. No one else knows; we alone have your secret."

"I am only afraid of two persons finding it out too soon," replied Rose, drearily; "my husband, and one other; you know who I mean. He was trying to find me, and I felt as if I could do nothing else but come here. Do you think he will ever guess that I am here?"

"Never!" replied Carl, emphatically.

"Hester tells me he has never married," said Rose, a glimmer of satisfaction dawning upon her face; "I am sorry for that. If he had a wife he would not be troubled about me. But even if he did not try to find me, I could not go away from here. I cannot tell you what it is to think of leaving my home again; it is the only home I have, and Hester has

promised I shall stay in it. It is more lonely than you can think ; I am here, day and night, all alone, yet I would not go away for the world. I know my husband will forgive me some time, and be very sorry for me. I have often wished for some clergyman to talk to; for there are hundreds and thousands of questions keep coming into my poor head. I am not very clever, but, perhaps, you will answer some of these questions. Only you are a very young man, and you do not know much of life yet."

"Perhaps not," answered Carl gently; "but I know something of God."

Rose looked again steadily into his face, which wore an air of grave yet tender reverence even for her, a lost and wretched woman. Her heart was sick for some communion with one who had authority to speak of God; that heart-sickness which forms the secret strength of the priesthood in every age; and Carl, with his noble and thoughtful face, and his keen eyes bent with unspoken compassion upon her, seemed like a messenger come from God to her.

"I think I could speak better to you alone," said Rose.

Hester left them at once, and Carl, taking the only other chair which was in the little room, seated himself opposite Rose. She did not seem in any hurry to begin the conversation with him, but sat playing listlessly with her work which lay upon her lap; and he waited patiently for her to ask him some of the questions which troubled her.

"I have something to tell you that I dare not tell Hester," she said at last, her head drooping and her cheeks flushing a little; "she is 'like an angel almost, as innocent and ignorant. Sometimes I wish she was more like other girls; but she has always been quite alone, and grown up very strange. Oh, she is strange, is Hetty! I suppose I have done something towards it. Are you a friend of hers?"

"To be sure I am," answered Carl, smiling to himself; for she was not looking towards him, but gazing into the fire before her.

"Then perhaps you will know why I feel a very, very long way off from her," she said, wistfully. "I love her more than I can tell, but she is as far away as if she were one of the stars. I can talk to you better than to her.

I am afraid to tell her all my secret; yet why I do not know. Why should I be afraid of little Hetty?"

Carl looked again at her with a glance of profound sorrow. He could have told her that it was her own sense of sin and shame which raised the barrier between her and Hester, but he did not. She seemed to catch his meaning from his silence; for she bowed her head, and burst into an agony of weeping.

"Oh, I know, I know!" she sobbed, when she had ceased to weep; "but how then can I come before God? How can I help being horribly afraid of Him?"

"Because God knows all your life," answered Carl, tenderly; "and because His perfect holiness is consistent with perfect mercy. We can only know in part, and forgive in part; but He has that complete knowledge of you, that you can have no thought hidden from Him. Therefore you can go to Him speechlessly, without drawing back, as you do from Hester."

"Do you think my husband will ever forgive me?" she asked.

"Only in part," said Carl, with deeper tenderness; "you must not hope for more. In

this, as in everything else, man can only copy God very imperfectly. He will forgive you, it may be, in the hour of his death, or yours ; but not before. There is a reproach and dishonour which cannot be wiped away."

"But what is to become of me?" cried Rose, wringing her hands in a paroxysm of grief and despair ; "how am I to lead this horrible life ? It would be better for me to die ; a hundred times better. Oh, you don't know what it is !"

"Is it much happier for Hester or your husband?" asked Carl, reproachfully ; "and they have been guilty of no sin."

"No," she exclaimed, turning quickly upon him ; "and why does God let them suffer for my folly? Why did not God strike me dead, before I brought all this evil upon them ? They have done no wrong, yet they are as miserable as I am."

"I spoke rashly," he said ; "they are far happier than you. Hester at least is not unhappy in herself. There is no anguish like the memory of sin."

"That is true," she moaned ; "I could bear anything better than that. I remember the time when I did not think myself a sinner.

I remember telling Miss Waldron I kept all God's commandments. I was a poor, silly young thing then; I know better now."

There was a painfully pathetic mournfulness in this confession, which Rose made in an abstracted and dreamy tone, as if she had lost herself in the recollection of those innocent days.

Carl did not break in upon her thoughts; and the silence prolonged itself for several minutes.

"Do you know I have not quite made up my mind about telling you my secret," she said, when she roused herself to the consciousness of his presence. "I am afraid you will tell Hester, and she will be farther off from me than ever. Do you think she will?"

"Tell me what it is," he answered, gently; "and if I think she will, I will keep it from her."

"Oh!" she said, shrinking and trembling, while her face burned, "I have never told anybody who knows my history. They believe that I am a widow; everybody believed it; and that my little girl is an orphan. I called her Hester because—ah! I scarcely know why

—Hester was the name I loved best ; and I fancied somehow that she would come home to live with the first Hester. But now I dare not tell her.”

“Where is your little girl ?” asked Carl, in a quiet and soothing voice.

“She was born in France,” she answered ; “I left Falaise, and went on and on through the country, not caring much, till I came to a little country convent, where there was a hospital for the country people,—for the old, and sick, and children, something like the work-houses here ; but not quite the same, because the sisters were the nurses ; and there my little child was born. They did not want to christen her Hester, but they did it at last, only they added Maria to it ; Hester Maria ; and they kept us there for six months. It was a very strange six months. I felt happier than I did before, and thought oftener of God, and His Son, Jesus Christ. But I never told the sisters about myself ; and after a while I knew I must do something to get my own living and the baby’s. They found me a place as lady’s maid, in a Catholic family, and I had to leave my baby at the convent, and go away to Paris.

Then I changed into an English family ; and after six years, I agreed to come back to England. I saw him, you know who, once in Paris, but he did not see me, and I felt quite faint. If I'd fainted he would have known who it was. So I came back to England."

"And your little girl?" said Carl again.

"I had scarcely ever seen her," continued Rose's wailing voice, "but then I paid the good sisters for her board, and brought her back with me. She is a pretty little thing; but so quiet, so sage and still. She is like the sisters themselves; you would say she never played or laughed. I was obliged to put her into a school in London, and she could never have any holidays, for I had no home, and neither of us have a single friend in the world. She has never been away from that school for four years, and it is in a close street in London. She does not know what it is to love a father or mother like other little children. Oh, why did not God strike me dead? And now her last half-year has not been paid, and they will be cruel to my poor little Hester. I know what many schools are. They won't send her out into the streets, but they will make a

drudge and a victim of her, to bear everybody's faults. Oh, I know how my little one is suffering ; but if God would only let me die, I am sure my husband would let Hester have her to live with her. Don't you think he would ? He is a good man."

She buried her face in her hands, and broke again into a passion of tears. Carl deliberated for some minutes before attempting to offer her any consolation ; and then he laid his hand softly upon her arm.

"Take comfort," he said ; "I have formed a plan for your little girl, your Hester. She shall be mine. I will adopt her as my own until Hester herself can take charge of her."

"What is it you said ?" asked Rose, incredulously ; and raising her tearful face to look at him.

"I will regard your little Hester as my own child," he answered ; "I am rich enough for that. You need not trouble yourself any more about her. She shall be my charge."

"But you live here in Little Aston," she said, her face still clouded with incredulity and anxiety, "you cannot bring her here. I would rather she died, the poor little thing, than ever

see her father. She believes her father is dead, and in heaven—in heaven! Oh! I could not bear that she should ever know different. No, no; you cannot take charge of my little Hester, living here.”

“Has she been happy where she is?” asked Carl.

“Oh, as happy as a little creature can be at school,” said Rose, “but not as happy as she was with the good sisters. She has been there four years, and she knows no other kind of life. Only if her bills are not paid, I know what sort of taunts she will have to bear, and that makes me suffer. I earn all the money I can by sewing, but I do not quite keep myself: and how can I get enough to pay for her? And she wants new frocks and other clothes, and shoes. What can I do? Whatever can I do?”

She dropped her face again helplessly upon her hands, while Carl deliberated once more.

There seemed nothing he could do, except engage to pay the expenses of the forlorn, deserted little child, in her dreary school-home in London. It was true that he could not bring her to Little Aston, as in the first moment he had thought of doing, where she could be

placed under Annie's care. The secret was not his own; it belonged to the poor mother, who dreaded that the child should ever discover she had a father not in heaven. He did not even know whether it would be well to confide it to Hester; it would only add to her cares and difficulties. There was nothing to be done at present but to pay the debts already accumulated, and to leave the child at school, until he could see more plainly how he could make her life happier.

"I suppose we must leave her where she is," he said, as soon as he had come to this conclusion, "but if you will give me the address I will write to-night, and ask the mistress of the school to send her account to me. You shall see it, and tell me if it is correct, and then you need feel no further uneasiness. I came in order to see if I could give you any comfort, any help. I am very glad to do this."

He spoke in a tone of such heart-felt sympathy, that Rose could not doubt his sincerity. She flung herself on her knees before him, and when he would not suffer her to kiss his hands, she sank down on the ground, crouching at his feet. He raised her up, spoke a few kindly

words to her, and then, seeing her agitation and trouble to be very great, he left her, and groped his way across the dark court into John Morley's house.

He did not see Hester again alone, for it was tea-time, and she was making tea for her father in his gloomy room, which, for this one hour of the day, put on a more home-like aspect than at any other. Carl sat down with them, and lost no movement or glance of Hester's, though his eyes were seldom turned directly to her. A strong current of happiness ran through his whole being. There was a mutual secret and a mutual sympathy between them which must draw them very closely together in the future. John Morley asked him some indifferent question with regard to the poor woman he had been to visit, and he answered at random, his thoughts being fixed upon Hester. A gleam of light, strangely sweet and sad, flashed across John Morley's gray face, as he looked up at hearing Carl's irrelevant answer, and saw him gazing at his daughter. There was no one else in Hester's little world, thought the father, whom she could marry.

A little later John Morley accompanied Carl

to chapel, where there was a meeting, and walking side by side with him, put his arm affectionately through his. A rare token of friendship from a man like him.

CHAPTER XXII.


HERESY.

THERE were, however, rocks ahead in the hitherto smooth tack of Carl's life-voyage. He had been sensitive enough to feel an immediate change in the atmosphere of Aston Court, and he had attributed it to his own confession to Miss Waldron. But there was also rankling in Mr. Waldron's mind the suspicion, introduced to it by his daughter, that Carl had dealt unfairly with regard to Hester and Robert. It happened, naturally, that he visited John Morley's house more than usual after his first interview with Rose; and the church was at no loss to account for it. Many a hint and allusion among the chapel people as to their young minister soon needing a house of his own, made Mr. Waldron wince sharply. He was convinced that Robert would never stay in the neighbourhood should Hester become Carl's wife. Without intention, he grew cool towards him, and Carl was not slow in withdrawing from his former familiar intimacy with his patron.

But there was a more perilous rock ahead than the mere darkening of the great man's countenance. It will be difficult to give Miss Waldron credit for conscientiousness in what is about to be narrated, but it is necessary to do so. Like the best and wisest amongst us, she was self-deceived at times, and saw through the fog of her own feelings. She believed herself to possess a keen eye for the faintest speck of heresy. To her purged sight it was needful that the sun itself should shine without spots. Now, like most young men of his age and genius, Carl's creed was not as firmly rooted and as artistically pruned as that of elder men; though he had gone diligently through a system of divinity, and knew very well how to argue for the peculiar tenets of their sect. But Miss Waldron discovered traces of suspicious latitudinarianism, which it was not difficult to account for. Carl had German proclivities and relations, for had he not been positively named after a German friend and fellow-student of his father's, who was probably inoculated with German errors? It became her painful duty to the church to point out these erroneous tenets. If rationalism found its way among the simple

flock at Little Aston, she and her father alone would be responsible.

Amongst the churches, no burr sticks so close as the charge of heterodoxy. Sunday after Sunday she watched with a sharp eye for Carl's German predilections, and hinted her doubts and objections to her father, till even he, shrewd though he was, began to listen with lessening confidence to his eloquent sermons. Though liberal to an extreme in politics, Mr. Waldron was a strong conservative in religion, and admitted but few to the franchise of the New Jerusalem. He took the alarm himself, and the suspicion spread through the church like a slow fever. It was found out that the younger members of the congregation were asking questions which it was difficult if not impossible to answer. The fledglings, who had nestled contentedly under the safe wings of old Mr. Watson, were beginning to stir and try their own frail pinions. The mere phrase "German rationalism" was a bugbear to the church, though they knew no more of it than of the differential calculus. There was, perhaps, just foot-hold for the charge of heterodoxy. Carl was at the time crossing the debateable



ground which every thoughtful spirit has to traverse, and he needed large and charitable sympathy from his fellow-pilgrims. Many a soul is driven from the fold by the foolish sparrings of its fellows.

It was one Sunday evening, after Carl had seemed to forget the beaten tracks, well trodden by his predecessors, and had ventured upon newer and fresher pasturage for his flock, that Miss Waldron spoke out openly.

"I begin to think," she said, solemnly, "that we should have done better for the church by choosing David Scott. I am sure Carl Bramwell's doctrine is not sound."

"His sermon to-night was very fine," said Mr. Waldron, in a tone of regret.

"But dangerous ; the more dangerous for its eloquence," continued Miss Waldron. "He preached works without faith."

"The other day you said he preached faith without works," observed Robert, with a sneer, partly at his sister, and partly at Carl.

"I am sure I don't know what he believes," she answered, peevishly ; "he teaches first one thing, and then the opposite. All I know is, that the females in my classes are quite

unsettled. I have already detected the Socinian heresy in one or two of them."

"My dear," suggested Mr. Waldron, "he cannot be heterodox in every direction."

"I don't know that," she argued; "when an intellect is once perverted, it runs greedily in the way of any error. But I am in great distress of mind; and I am sure we ought to call a church-meeting about it. An awful responsibility rests upon us; in one sense the church is in our keeping."

Mr. Waldron mused a little while with an expression of embarrassment and pain upon his face. His daughter had reached this point by little and little, with here a word and there a word, until he was really disturbed about the church; though he felt an inward shame of his disquietude. The coolness between himself and Carl had been gradually increasing; for the latter, with all a young man's dread of sycophancy and servility, had met Mr. Waldron's change of manner with a distance and reserve equal to his own. He had been even a little too independent of his patron in his arrangements with respect to the church; and Mr. Waldron had felt chafed and

angry. He came to the conclusion that a church-meeting would do no harm ; and the responsibility and burden would be partly taken off his shoulders. Carl consented to summon it, but declined to be himself present.

Upon the occasion of this meeting, to the great wonder of the little church, the tall, thin, bent form of John Morley, whose voice had been silent so many years, rose up in its dark corner, and his tones, slow and tardy in their utterance, as that of a man long unused to speech, sounded solemnly through the little chapel.


"You are about to do a great wrong, brethren," he said. "This pastor of ours is a young man, younger than any man among us. His mind is more active than ours, and more open to mental and spiritual influences. What if he should venture sometimes upon unknown seas? I know him well, and I can answer for him that there is no desire in his heart so strong as to know the truth ; and that the truth should make him free. We do not ourselves know all the truth ; we can but make guesses at it. And shall not he make his guesses also! Even if he were in error,

would it not be wiser, better,—more like Christ, who did not cast away Peter, though he said to Him, ‘Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men,’—would it not be more like Him to restore our pastor, in a spirit of meekness, from any error into which he may have fallen? I say, brethren, pray for him as much and as often as ye please; but do not set upon him, in the very outset of his career, the brand of heresy. You may make him what he is not,—a heretic.”

John Morley sat down, and Hester crept closer to him, and pressed his hand tightly in her own.

Miss Waldron also moved nearer her father's side, and pushed him on with her elbow. She was pale, and her lips moved with nervous twitchings. She was not at all sure what her father would say; and every eye was rivetted upon him. The decision rested with him alone.

“Brethren,” he said, “you have heard Brother Morley state that we are, all of us, mere guessers at truth. What? Have we not then the open Bible in our hands? And



have we not, for our better instruction in its mysteries, the Commentary and Institutes of Calvin? Have we no carefully digested system of theology, in which our students are well grounded before they are sent forth as the commissioned overseers of God's people? The best thing that Brother Morley can say is that our pastor is making guesses at truth! But can we trust our souls to a guesser only? Is not that like the blind leading the blind? True, he is younger than we are; but we look upon him as one wiser, better instructed than we; one whose whole time and talents are consecrated to the study of religious truths. We bring our souls, weary and fretted with the world, to be comforted and nourished by him, whom we set apart from the vexations of worldly labour. We commit our youth, and our children to his teaching. How easily could he insinuate error into our unguarded souls, and the souls of our children. There is danger for a church when its leader and teacher is no more than a guesser at truth."

Mr. Waldron said a good deal more than he intended; but it was so long since he had had the chance of a wrestle with John

Morley, that he warmed to it, as the heart of an old soldier warms at the voice of a foe. He expected his speech to bring his opponent to his feet again, as in old times ; but John Morley sat still, his white head bowed, and his face turned away from his brethren : the brief flame, having flickered, had gone out. The next speaker followed emphatically upon Mr. Waldron's side ; and at the close of the meeting, which lasted double its ordinary time, it was all but formally decided that Carl was too deeply tainted with heresy to be fit for the pastorate of the small church at Little Aston.

CHAPTER XXIII.


OUT OF THE DARK.

It would be utterly impossible to describe the agony and dismay of Carl at the conduct of his church in bringing the charge of heresy against him. They pronounced him to have been found wanting in the most vital point. He had given himself with unchecked ardour and vigour to his work. He had felt a glow of inextinguishable exultation in calling himself a Christian minister. He had thrown over all the littlenesses and follies and blemishes of his church a glow of spiritual interest and romance. He had clipped for it the wings of his ambition, which had been stretched for a higher sphere than Little Aston. He had thought of it, cared for it, dreamed for it, studied it, as a young husband cares for and studies his bride. And now! Scarcely a year had elapsed since he had espoused her in all her meanness and poverty, and she had turned against him as one unfit to be her head.

There was not even a division of opinion in

the church. One and all had followed in the wake of Mr. Waldron, who had been betrayed into a course from which he could not retreat with dignity; though he longed for the church to assert its own independence, and to drive him from his position. On the contrary, everybody agreed with him. He even began to suspect that his daughter had been using him as a cat's-paw; and in his quickened shrewdness he fancied the offence Carl was being punished for was very far removed from heresy. It weighed very heavily with him, that the young minister should quit his first charge with the stigma of unsound doctrine attaching to him.

For it soon came to that. Carl, with the generous impatience of youth, would not stay with his church if it turned cold ungrateful looks upon him. He sent in his resignation, in a letter written in bitter sorrow and hot anger, as a lover might bid farewell to a faithless mistress. He must leave Annie and Grant, he must leave even Hester. He must throw himself afresh upon the world, dishonoured by no slight dishonour. From his earliest boyhood he had been set apart and trained for the ministry, to which his father and his father's



father had belonged, and now he was declared unworthy of his office! He did not know how to turn himself to any other pursuit. It was even possible, for any calamity seemed possible after this, that he might come to be in want of bread. The prospect, looked at in the brightest light, was but dismal: looked at from the sombre gloom of his spirits, it was desperate. With the loss of his reputation for orthodoxy, he seemed to have lost everything.

The church was then meeting for the reception of his resignation, and he was deeply sunk in melancholy musing, when his study-door softly opened, and he could scarcely give credence to his own senses. There stood John Morley, breathless and palpitating, with an air of self-amazement and fear upon his face. He looked in at Carl, as if he were in a dream; but the gripe he gave to his outstretched hand was anything but doubtful or nerveless.

"I could not stay after your letter was read," said John Morley. "Do you know all that is likely to befall you? Do you know what reports will go out against you to the other churches?"

"I foresee all," answered Carl, with a profound sigh, which was almost a sob.

"Are you prepared to enter some other denomination?" he asked. "You would be welcomed among many; but they would not be the people of your fathers."

"No," he answered, with an aspect of sad resolution. "I cannot change the creed I received from my forefathers. I must remain among my own people, even if I cease to be a minister among them."

"Then what will become of you? How will you live?" asked John Morley.

"God knows," said Carl, almost with a smile.

"My boy," continued John Morley, sadly, "ten years ago I was comparatively a rich man, and I wish I were so still, for your sake. But I have few possessions now except debts and my Hester. Still, give an ear to me. If you should be put out of the ministry, there could be no occupation more suited to you than mine. You may be a student and a scholar, if you are a bookseller. Nay, you may yourself become a writer of books. Come to me, then. My business was once good enough, and in young hands, like yours, it would thrive again. Do not despise it, Carl. It seems to me as if you might lift me out of my Slough of Despond."

But this is only if you should fail in getting another charge. I trust another pulpit will soon be given to you."

John Morley had spoken hurriedly and stammeringly, and Carl had kept silent in amazement. But when he ended, and stretched out his trembling hand to him, Carl caught it eagerly, and bowed down his head upon it to hide his tears.

"Despise it!" he cried; "your home would be like a heaven to me. You love me then? You would take me as your son?"

"With all my heart, my boy," said John Morley, laying his other hand tenderly upon the young man's head.

"And I accept your offer with all my heart," said Carl, after a brief silence. "You know I believe myself called by God to this ministry; but if He gives me no place in another church, I will return here gladly, as freely to you as to a father. We will confront the world together; and it will go hard with me indeed, if I do not win bread for you and Hester, as well as for myself."

A brighter look was upon John Morley's face than Carl had ever seen there. He asked

him to walk home with him, as if he shrank from traversing a second time the streets to which he had been so long a stranger; and Carl accompanied him in a trance of mingled joy and sadness. The dark gables of John Morley's house, standing out against the darkness of the sky, possessed a new beauty for him. Even the dismal sitting-room, with its worn-out furniture, had a glory about it. He could very well pass a blissful life here with Hester. The future was no longer so dreary and blank to him; for if he were compelled to relinquish the lawful ambition of his calling, here would be his happiness as well as scope for his scholarly pursuits. He was already painting the coming years in bright colours, while he watched John Morley light his lamp, when he saw him casting an anxious and nervous glance at the black panes of the uncurtained window.

"Carl," he whispered, as if fearful of being overheard by some one without. "I have a fancy some nights of a face which looks in upon me out of the dark. I have never spoken of it to Hester, lest a child like her should be frightened. But look now at yonder corner."

Carl looked earnestly, and detected in the

thick darkness of the night, the wan outline of Rose's face, far enough from the casement to be only a dim and indistinct sketch. But it was there, with far-off eyes, gazing in upon her husband. A thrill of dread and compassion for them both ran through him. If John Morley should only resolve to verify for himself the reality of this haunting face, what would happen? He fixed his eyes more keenly upon the apparition, and advanced a step or two nearer the window, and it vanished suddenly into the darker shades of the night.

"Do you see anything?" asked John Morley, eagerly.

"There is nothing," answered Carl, the prevarication jarring upon his delicate sense of truth; "but you should have a curtain to this window. These fancies are not good for you."

"Nay, I like the night to stare in upon me," he replied gloomily. "I wonder, at times, if it sees any creature as like itself as I am; neither sun nor stars in many days appearing, and no small tempest lying on me. No, no. Let that face, as well as the night, stare in to see what sort of a wretch lives here."

He sat down on his own chair, with his gray

.

face half turned from the window, and the full light of the lamp falling upon it. He sank into a long, dreamy fit of reverie, while Carl watched anxiously the black, blank casement beyond him. The pale shadow of John Morley's wife looked in no more; but Carl, before going away, resolved to warn Rose of the risk she ran in thus venturing to gaze in upon the hearth she had forsaken and lost for ever.



CHAPTER XXIV.


CARL BRAMWELL'S FAREWELL.

MR. WALDRON'S first action, after having performed the painful duty of reading to the church Carl's resignation, was to write at once to Dr. Hervey, the principal of the college, and entreat him to do all in his power to procure the young discarded minister a new charge. He found it a very difficult matter to explain his own conduct ; but what is there that cannot be explained, almost to satisfaction, when it is a self-explanation which is given ? Carl's heresy dwindled down into certain refinements of theological and metaphysical distinctions too abstruse for the simple church, which could only digest the food of babes. Nothing would give Mr. Waldron greater pleasure than to see Carl in a position where his active and energetic mind could find more congenial hearers ; and if the doctor could hit upon any plan for advancing his interests, he would do anything in his power to further them.

In the meantime, David Scott came down to

take Carl's place in the pulpit, and to be patronized by Miss Waldron ; while he stood on one side, and saw David drive away in her carriage, and himself only acknowledged by a freezing bow, strangled in its birth. Carl laughed at times, and chafed at times ; and then repented of both natural emotions, with a sincere effort to gain the mastery over nature. Annie felt the same, and yielded without any attempt at all to conquer herself ; she only longed for some opportunity of speaking with feminine fidelity to her former friend. Robert came no more to Grant's house, though he was cordial with Grant himself, when he met him.

It became a question with Carl whether he should not at once accept John Morley's offer. He had so modest an opinion of himself that it did not seem beneath him to condescend to the business of a bookseller ; and he spent the greater portion of his time in John Morley's house, with the idea that he was learning something of it. He drew closer to every member of the isolated household. Once again, as she went about the house, Hester sang gravely, but sweetly, songs which stirred his heart with the most delicious tremour. A blessed calm




visited the desolate home. Even John Morley's worn face and sunken eyes seemed to catch a reflection of the pervading peace; as if he had at last consented to a truce with his tormenting memories. Carl began to think that his pastorate was there, and that the little flock given into his care numbered only John Morley and Hester, and the lost and banished one, hidden from the sight of all men.

But before long, in the midst of this slumber of ambition, came a more important call than before for Carl. There was a great spring gathering of their denomination in London, and Mr. Waldron was to take the chair at the chief public meeting. In his palmiest days at Aston Court, Carl would never have dreamed of being present as a speaker at this meeting, where the greatest of their preachers would occupy the platform. But his friend, Dr. Hervey, who had been one of the appointed speakers, was seized with a sudden illness a day or two before, and sent for Carl. He told him what he wished to say, and started him off at once for London.

Carl achieved one of those brilliant and dangerous successes which occasionally fall to the lot of young orators. He took the meeting by

storm, and made every speech succeeding his fall flat upon the excited minds of the audience. Miss Waldron, who held a prominent place on the platform, drew her veil over her face, and wept some of the bitterest tears of her life. When the etiquette of the meeting permitted it, all the speakers crowded round Carl, whose father had been known to most of them, and congratulated him upon his triumph. Mr. Waldron shook hands with him publicly, and was loudly cheered for doing so. There was no longer a fear for Carl's future; and his heterodoxy was forgiven and forgotten on the spot.

Carl's absence from Little Aston, which he had supposed would be only for three or four days, prolonged itself into weeks. Sunday after Sunday he was called upon to supply some pulpit in London and the neighbourhood. It ended in his being invited to become co-pastor of one of the first and richest churches in London, whose minister was beginning to fail under the burden of his work. He accepted the offer only on condition that for six months he should be among them as a candidate merely, that they might judge whether he



merited the brand of heresy. For it was possible, he said, that his views of truth, differing somewhat from the traditional theology, might fall under their censure, as at Little Aston.

He went home at last, but only for a few days. There was a conflict in his mind as to whether he should yet utter his love to Hester, or wait until his own future was sure. Unfortunately and unwisely he decided upon keeping silence. He believed that Hester would feel too greatly divided between her duties to her father and Rose, and to him. She had asked him once, in a tone of trouble and supplication, not to let Grant talk any more about her leaving home. It would be impossible to do so, she added, hurriedly, for many years to come, if the time ever came. Carl's sensitive nature fancied there was a dread in her mind lest he should say anything to disturb her peace; and he resolved to say nothing till he could say all.


Among the farewells he had to take none was so painful as parting with Rose. Her life was so sad, so solitary, and so peculiar, that it drew his chivalrous and tender heart very closely to her. The bond between them had something of the sacred relationship of a priest

towards a penitent, whom he may absolve or condemn. She saw no one else but him and Hester; and she naturally leaned more upon him than upon a fellow-woman. Hester was the daughter of the husband she had betrayed, and she dared not reveal to her all the remorseful memories which oppressed her broken spirit.

"I have something to tell you," said Carl, as the best consolation he could give her when he was about to leave her in circumstances so desolate; "I have seen your child, your little Hester; and now I am going to live in London she shall come very often to my house."

"God bless you!" cried Rose, sobbing. "But what is to become of me when you are gone? I feel at times as if I must force my way to my husband, and let him strike me dead if he will. I don't know whether I am doing right to be so near to him without him knowing it."

"You must be patient," said Carl, pitifully; "you must not tempt him to revenge. Do you not know how he nearly murdered Robert Waldron at his own door, and he would have died in the street if my brother Grant had not found him? Do you wish him to be hurried into murder? Be patient, and leave yourself



in Hester's hands. She knows her father better than we do ; she loves him more ; she will not lose the right time, if it ever come, of confessing all to him. Trust yourself to Hester."

"But how can I be patient?" she exclaimed, her pale face growing paler. "I think day and night that I shall never hear his voice speaking to me again. Perhaps even in heaven, where you tell me there is a place even for me, I shall be nowhere near him ; and it may be that through all eternity I shall never hear him say, 'I forgive you.' Ah! you cannot tell what it is, you and Hester, who all your lives long have lived as if you looked up into the face of God Himself, and who have no pardon to seek but His, and He has little to forgive. Every night I lie awake and think that death will surely come before I hear him forgive me."


"These are only fancies," said Carl, gently ; "you are likely to live many years. Your illness is passing away, Grant says. But there is a nearer hope for you perhaps. As soon as I can offer Hester and her father a home with me, I shall ask her to be my wife ; I shall ask her father to give her to me. Do you think they will consent?"

"Consent!" repeated Rose. "She loves you, and he thinks of you as a son, she says."

"Then," continued Carl, his face flushing with anticipated joy; "as soon as he is happy once more, when a portion of gloom passes away from his life, we can turn his thoughts to you; and perhaps, who can tell? your forgiveness may be fuller than we hope for now. Why! when Hester becomes my wife the whole of life will be turned to gladness."

He felt as if the whole world would be made partakers of the joy he looked forward to. At the least all *his* world would be illuminated and warmed by it; and in the new summer which would begin for John Morley it might not be impossible to bring about a perfect reconciliation between him and Rose. The glow of his hope fell for a brief season upon her heart; but it died away, and left a more chilly darkness behind it, when Carl was gone, and she knew that it would be very long before she could see him again.

At the request of David Scott, and with the hearty approbation of Mr. Waldron, Carl preached once more to his first church before leaving Little Aston for London. He knew it



well now, with all its foibles and littlenesses. It was no longer an assembly of angels. But it was with a larger charity that he bade it a last farewell. It had already repented of its unfaithfulness and unkindness, and looked back regretfully on its short-lived union with its eloquent young pastor; but the tie had been broken by itself, and could never be re-knit. Mr. Waldron felt it, and did not hold his head as erect, or sing with so much energy and freedom as usual; while his daughter listened for the last time to Carl with conflicting emotions of exultation and chagrin.

A handwritten mark consisting of a thick, curved stroke on the left and a thin, horizontal line extending to the right, ending in a small dot.



